

SAINT FOUCAULT'S HOLLOW HAGIOGRAPHY

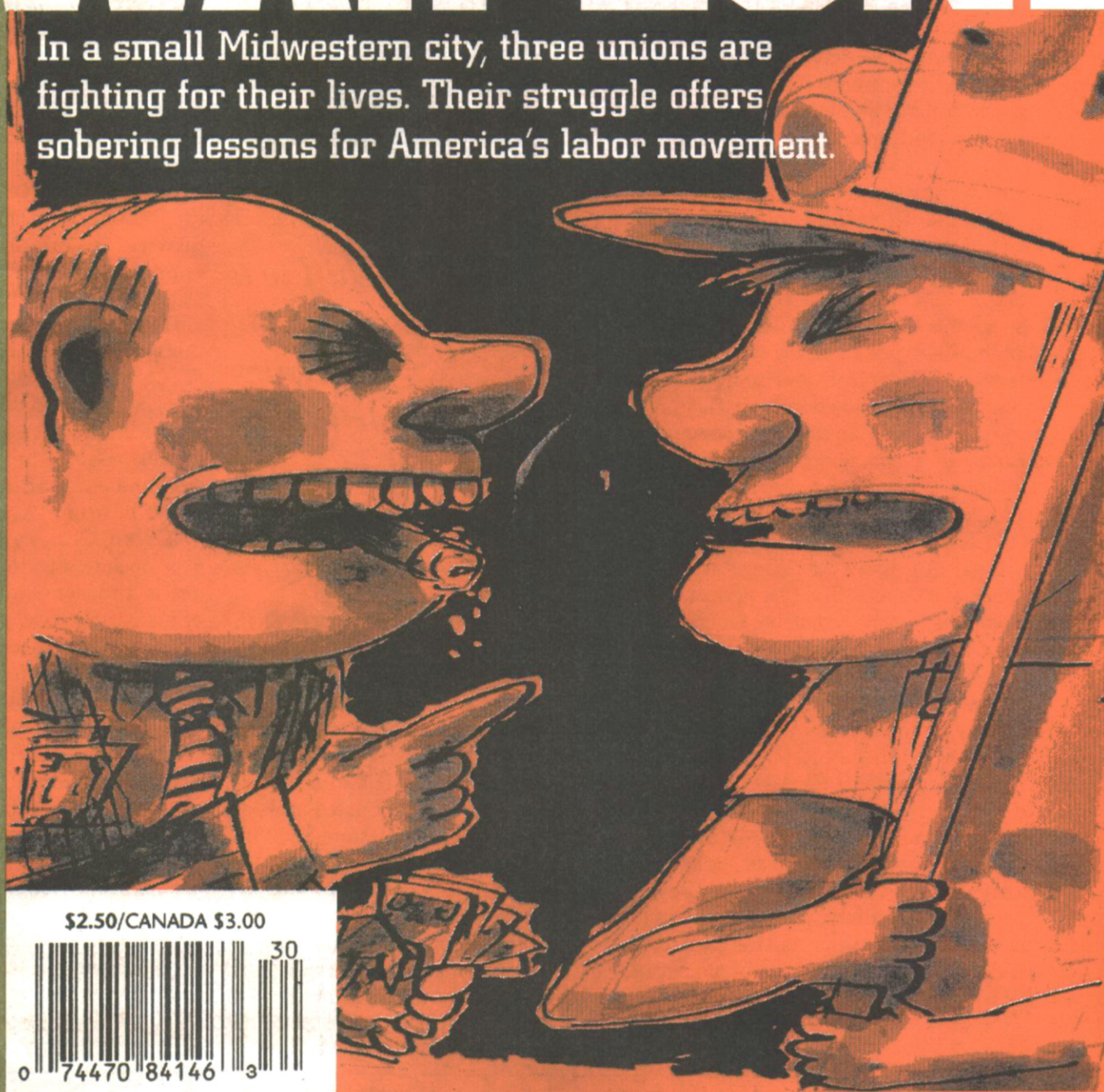
July 24 - August 6, 1995

# IN THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

## WAR ZONE

In a small Midwestern city, three unions are fighting for their lives. Their struggle offers sobering lessons for America's labor movement.



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**E D I T O R I A L****CLINTON GEARS UP FOR 1996**

**W**ith the next presidential election 15 months away, Bill Clinton has begun his re-election campaign. His strategy apparently has two parts. The first, to which we have been subjected almost since he took office, is to submit to the agenda of corporate America, which made him its candidate in 1992. This entails compromise with mainstream Republicans in an effort to isolate the loose cannons on the right whose Contract with America is a formula for social instability and disaster. The idea here is for Clinton to present himself as the safe and sane choice and the Republicans as captives of irresponsible radicals, thereby winning over the really big money.

But even though this approach is based on winning within the confines of the 40-50 percent of the electorate that voted in recent elections, the traditional social base of the Democratic Party can be ignored only at Clinton's peril. Thus part two of his strategy: to revive the populist rhetoric of his 1992 campaign in an attempt to prevent massive disaffection among trade unionists, African-Americans, women and progressive-minded people in general.

Both parts of Clinton's strategy were apparent in the rambling speech he gave on July 6 at Georgetown University, his undergraduate alma mater. The first part came through in his remarks about finding "common ground" with the Republicans and the need for civility and cooperation. He also criticized two safe targets on the extreme right, the National Rifle Association (NRA) and Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC). Increasingly isolated in its defense of automatic weapons, the NRA is splitting Republican ranks, as is Helms in his attacks on funding for AIDS research. All this was standard Clinton.

But the second part was Clinton in his role as campaigner, not as president. It was 1992 all over again, as he dwelled at length on economic trends, talking about the growing gap between rich and poor Americans, growing job insecurity in the mania for corporate downsizing and the great increase in temporary workers. Thus, in the course of his remarks, he defended government programs against "powerful interests" who "call all the shots" but "are driven only by short-term

considerations." We tried that before, he said, and it led to the Great Depression of the '30s.

The campaign mode, of course, is poll-driven and does not represent principled commitment or intention to act. But it does create an opportunity in which the Democratic Party's traditional social base can briefly become a player in Washington politics. And in this context we can expect Clinton to move in a more progressive direction, however fleetingly.

One clear and welcome example of this is Clinton's granting of full diplomatic recognition to Vietnam, a win-win proposition that satisfies business interests that have been eager to participate in that country's rapidly growing economy, while acknowledging the validity of

opposition to the Vietnam War. And, of course, it helped that opinion polls show a solid majority in favor of recognition.

Similarly, Clinton has been reading the polls on the environment. This led the administration to announce that it was going to emphasize environmental concerns, at least in its rhetoric, until November of 1996. But despite this startling openness about the administration's short-term motivation, the need to look good on this issue creates real opportunities for the revival of the environmental movement, a beginning of which has been seen in opposition to "salvage logging"

*Clinton's shift to a  
campaign mode  
creates  
opportunities  
for the Democrats'  
social base to  
gain more  
influence.*

provisions in the appropriations bill that prompted Clinton's first veto threat in March (See *ITT*, May 29). So far, though, Clinton hasn't produced the sort of tangible results on the environment that he has on Vietnam.

Given Clinton's new openness to the needs and demands of his party's base, it is vital for those on the left to become more aggressive and

make their voices heard. One such example is the heroic action of Sens. Paul Wellstone (D-MN) and Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL) on June 30, when they forced a 10-day delay in a negotiated package of mid-year budget cuts, in an attempt to restore \$600 million for youth job training and assistance for the elderly. Their effort should be an occasion for popular pressure on the administration not to compromise on such issues.

But the more important task for the left is to mobilize popular support for defense of the environment and for spending on the social needs being sacrificed in the interest of corporate bottom lines. ◀

## IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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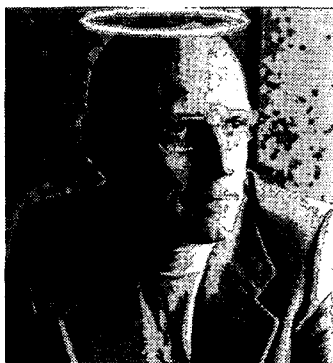


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# LETTERS

## Historical memory

The recent conviction of former Chilean generals Manuel Contreras and Pedro Espinoza for the assassination of my former Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) colleagues Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt was a small, but significant, vindication of justice. So when Fred Spielberg ("Etc.," June 26) writes that the cases would probably have reached a resolution but for the activism of Fabiola Letelier, Orlando's sister, "and the impartial investigation of Judge Adolfo Bañados," we at IPS feel compelled to flesh out the larger picture.

Undeniably, the efforts of Fabiola and Judge Bañados were critical to the outcome of the case. But *ITT* readers should also know about the 18 years of legal efforts by Sam Buffone and Michael Tigar, the lawyers representing Isabel Letelier, the widow, and Michael Moffitt, the widower. Isabel

and Michael worked tirelessly to rid Chile of Pinochet and hold him responsible for the murders of their loved ones and of thousands of others. They delegitimated his regime in Congress, the State Department and governments and NGOs throughout the world. In 1980, when the secret police were terrorizing Pinochet opponents in and out of Chile, Isabel valiantly traveled to Santiago and physically confronted the security force's thugs.

The civil suit she and Michael filed kept the case alive in the United States and Chile, as did the relentless work of FBI Special Agents Robert Scherrer and Carter Cornick. They, along with other officials in the Justice and State Department, continued to throw the case in Pinochet's face even as the Reagan administration officially made nice with him. Orlando's colleagues at IPS never let up, publishing updates on the case, informing Congress and mobilizing in the human rights community.

By the way, Moffitt was not Orlando's aide, as Spielberg reports, but a staff worker at IPS. Each year IPS hosts a Letelier-Moffitt human rights award ceremony, to keep alive the victims' memory. This year, we are proud to announce that the Letelier-Moffitt awards will go to American lawyer Jennifer Harbury, Rose Johnson of the Center for Democratic Renewal in Georgia, and the Human Rights Platform in Haiti.

Saul Landau

Senior Fellow,  
Institute for Policy Studies  
Washington, D.C.

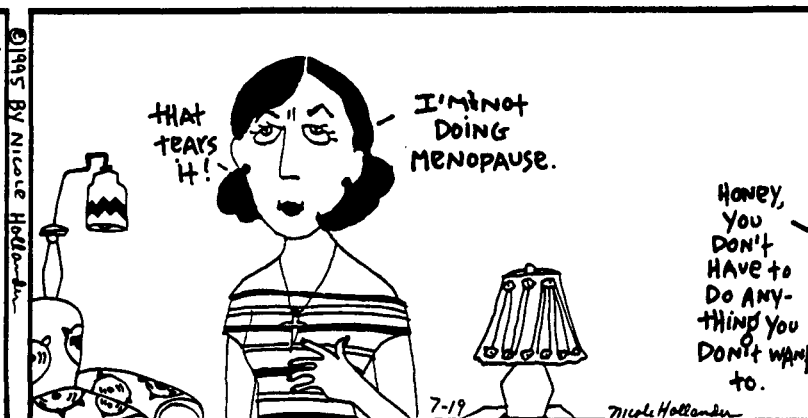
*Fred Spielberg replies:* Of course Saul Landau is right to mention those in the United States who played a role in bringing Contreras and Espinoza to justice. Space limited a fuller listing. For greater detail, please read Landau's excellent book (co-written with John Dinges), *Assassination on Embassy Row*.

However, progressives also need to know how to recognize a pyrrhic victory when they see one. A month after the sentence was handed down, Contreras is still not in prison. Using poor health as an excuse, the retired general has taken refuge in a naval hospital, where doctors have found that he is suffering from hypertension, a hernia, diabetes and a cancer relapse—effectively precluding his ever serving time in jail. Espinoza is in the new, cushy Punta Peuco prison for military officials con-

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander

*The Woman who is Easily irritated*  
LEARNS THAT, ALTHOUGH HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY PROBABLY PROTECTS MENOPAUSAL WOMEN AGAINST OSTEOPOROSIS, HEART ATTACKS AND COLON CANCER, IT ALSO MAY CAUSE BREAST CANCER... BUT NO ONE KNOWS FOR SURE BECAUSE THE LARGE-SCALE STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF HRT JUST STARTED AND THE RESULTS WILL NOT BE IN UNTIL 2005.





victed of human rights violations—he is the first inmate. Espinoza will serve a little more than a year, costing the Chilean taxpayers 90 times the expense of a normal felon. Michael Townley, who planted the bomb in Letelier's car, now lives in the United States under a new identity thanks to the U.S. government's witness protection program. The culminating irony of the case—which has been touted by many as a watershed in the Chilean justice system—is that by focusing on two high-ranking generals, it implicitly absolves higher-ups as well as the institutions that were in power at the time.

## X-phobia

Ana Marie, I think you missed the point ("Saved from X-tinction," *ITT*, June 26). The mere fact that there were already three online bulletin boards devoted to *The X-Files* in the fall of 1993, before Rupert Murdoch bought into the Net via Delphi—and at a time when you yourself state that the show "seemed destined to fail"—serves to disprove both prongs of your own cockamamie conspiracy theory: that "its 'following' was suspiciously quick to emerge"; and that the show's fans were somehow manipulated by Murdoch.

Lady, you make Oliver Stone blush!

Why can't you just admit that it's a great show that has earned a respectful following? I failed to notice any mention of quality in your tract.

So what if *The X-Files* gives its viewers what they want? That's exactly what all the tripe from *Charlie's Angels* to *Baywatch* has always claimed. This time it just happens to be demonstrably true. At least the show's producers are not pandering to the lowest common denominator—like the vast majority of network programming does.

I think you're a little paranoid—how do you know alien hit-men won't be hired to "take you out" for peddling such bullshit? It sounds to me as if Fusco and Co. are rendering a real service to the X-Philes. Just because

they have nothing to do, why do you want spoil their fun?

I think you're frustrated because you can't think of anything really worth writing about. Why not give us all a break and just hold your water?

Rick Felgenhauer  
Chicago

## Virtual unreality

I would have taken Ana Marie Cox's idiotic, meandering diatribe against *The X-Files*, its fans and their online communications with its creators seriously if there was any evidence in her piece that she had actually seen the show or read the messages that the fans post.

Even preposterous statements like "If you have an opinion, chances are Rupert Murdoch had some influence in shaping it" can be dismissed as simply bad writing.

The trouble is, Cox isn't entitled to an opinion on *The X-Files* because she doesn't understand the first thing about the issues she sought to attack in her screed. She had it all backwards: Fans glom on to TV-related bulletin boards *after* they have become hooked on a show—the tail doesn't wag the dog. If the number of people with access to the Delphi service all watched *The X-Files* weekly, it still wouldn't make a significant difference in the ratings.

Cox seems to think that Rupert Murdoch engaged in some sort of subliminal trickery to create an audience for a show that struggled through its first year. Get real: *The X-Files* grew in popularity through word of mouth, and because Fox didn't want to give up too early on a series it believed in.

Jeff Ristine  
San Diego

*Ana Marie Cox replies: Mistrs Felgenhauer and Ristine seem to have missed the point of my article entirely, which, frankly, disappoints me. Until now, I had dismissed the theories holding that electromagnetic waves emitted by television might affect intellectual capacity. However, assuming that Felgenhauer and Ristine are (at*

*least chronologically) beyond puberty, nothing else could explain their witless response to my analysis.*

*Papa Rupert would be proud of their devotion to the The X-Files, especially since it has distracted them from the larger issues at hand. Instead of trying to understand the political and cultural implications of Murdoch's synergistic empire, they focused on a perceived slight against their favorite TV show. The "greatness" of The X-Files was not at issue in my essay. The fact that some readers choose to interpret my article as a pan, not just of the show but of them personally, only proves my basic point: In a Murdochian universe, the lines between a product, its publicity and its public are hopelessly blurred. We are what we consume.*

## Corporate citizen

Joel Bleifuss ("The First Stone," June 26) notes that Rep. Dick Armey (R-TX) recently implied that Monsanto is a left-leaning corporation. Armey "singled out Monsanto for grants to the Children's Defense Center and the NAACP of East St. Louis, Ill."

Monsanto, a left-leaning corporation? In *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol quotes a reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* speaking about East St. Louis: "The chemical companies do not pay taxes here. They have created small incorporated towns which are self-governed and exempt therefore from supervision by health agencies in East St. Louis. ... Monsanto is in Sauget ... [which] isn't much more than a legal fiction. It provides tax shelter and immunity from jurisdiction of authority in East St. Louis."

So much for left-leaning Monsanto, Mr. Armey.

George Caplan  
Belmont, Mass.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

# InSHORT



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## TONIC FOR THE TURKS

**A**t dawn on July 5, Turkey invaded northern Iraq, seeking to attack military bases of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a militant Turkish opposition group. The attack renewed an earlier six-week assault Turkey had launched on March 20. The March invasion proceeded with the tacit approval of President Bill Clinton: Turkish troops could not have crossed into northern Iraq if the United States and other allied powers in the region had not suspended the the U.N.-monitored "no fly zone" that has safeguarded Iraqi Kurds from Saddam Hussein since the end of the Gulf War. In blatant violation of the U.N. mission to create a Kurdish "safe haven" in the area, the United States effectively authorized 35,000 foreign troops to invade. Today, U.S. support of the Turkish campaign continues. The administration has not criticized Turkey's attack and urges only that the operation's scope remain limited and that civilians be protected.

In early June the State Department issued a report that acknowledges for the first time that Turkey is using U.S.-supplied weapons in operations where human rights violations occur. The report confirms what human rights groups have long known: Turkey regularly employs the Lockheed-Martin F-16; the Textron-Bell Cobra and Super Cobra attack helicopters; the United Technologies/Sikorsky Black Hawk troop transport; and various tanks, armored personnel carriers and artillery systems to attack and forcibly evacuate Kurdish villages. Innocent villagers are caught in a deadly predicament: If



## You dropped a bomb on me

Timothy McVeigh's days and nights behind bars have been lightened by a steady stream of mail from admirers, the Associated Press reports—including a number from



women who seem to have fallen in love with the boyish reactionary and alleged terrorist

bomber. One letter, offering support of sorts for the bombing, was adorned with a smiley face and described the alleged bomber as "cute." An Illinois woman, an especially fervent admirer, has sent McVeigh nearly a dozen missives, and promises to wait for him until he's free. "I bought a wedding gown and it is here for you when you come home," she wrote. "I want custody of you."

## In the Navy

Those in search of a wild time this weekend should forget about the bars—and join the Navy instead. The Family Research Council, a conservative think tank, contends that



"the forced feminization of the military" has led to an alarming rise of pregnan-

cy among today's sailors. More alarming, the group claims, is a rash of "sexual harassment charges filed for personal gain." Such charges have allegedly driven Admirals Frank Kelso, Stanley Arthur and Henry Mauz from the Navy. "These wounded warriors were put ashore by the politically correct Navy," lamented retired Lt. Col. Bob Maginnis, a spokesman for the Council. He did not specify how or where exactly these men were wounded.

## Spare the rod

If it's July, it must be courtesy month in Singapore. Every year since 1979, the sternly governed island nation has conducted a month-long campaign to induce polite behavior among its citizenry. Singapore—which in past campaigns has



preached the benefits of punctuality and table manners—kicked off the celebra-

tion this year with a TV special featuring inspiring speeches, pop stars and the slogan "Courtesy—that's my kind of word." According to the Associated Press, Singapore's National Courtesy Council has commissioned an academic study to determine new norms of courtesy. Presumably, premeditated discourtesy will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

## APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Models Inc.—redible!
2. Infomercial Irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-Idious
6. Reoul Cédras-tic
7. Otto North nasty
8. Mollay In Rwanda
9. Zhirinovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

they refuse to join the government-backed local militia, they are branded "PKK terrorists" and attacked; but if they express support for the government, they face attack from the PKK.

Since the Turkish crackdown on the PKK began in 1984, some 2,000 Kurdish villages in southeastern Turkey have been depopulated in an attempt to destroy the PKK's logistical bases and support. As a result, about 2 million of Turkey's 10 million Kurds have been displaced. Throughout this period, the United States has been Turkey's leading weapons supplier. From 1987-91, according to William Hartung of the World Policy Institute, Turkey bought 76 percent of its weapons from the United States. From 1991-93, the counter-insurgency war intensified, with human rights abuses worsening—and the U.S. share of Turkey's weapons increasing to 80 percent.

Although the State Department has rarely restricted the flow of U.S. weapons to Turkey, a recent proposal to sell 493 CBU-87 cluster bombs met with skepticism in various executive branch offices. Turkey, eager to avoid an open rebuff based on its human rights record, opted in February to withdraw its request for the highly lethal bombs. Last year, Congress voted to withhold 10 percent of Turkey's FY 1995 \$364.5 million military aid package, pending the State Department's report on human rights abuses and the role of U.S. weapons in the war against the Kurds.

Still, with the administration seeking to give Turkey more than \$450 million in military assistance in 1996, these gestures amount to a slap on the wrist. Germany, by contrast, made a principled decision to freeze all military aid to Ankara in response to the invasion. In spite of this, the United States has continually argued that arms exports to Turkey are needed "to preserve the strategic relationship" with one of the region's leading military powers, in the words of one administration official. With ethnic violence everywhere on the rise, posing a major threat to global peace, U.S. arms shipments to Turkey send exactly the wrong message to countries embroiled in ethnic and territorial conflicts.

—Jennifer Washburn

## MAJOR BUMMER

After all the hoopla about a political realignment in Britain, John Major remains prime minister. With a new-look, slightly more centrist Cabinet and the votes of 218 of his 329 Members of Parliament—tendered on July 4—the Archduke of Bland sits proudly at the helm of his rudderless ship. After resigning as leader of the Conservative Party on June 22 and challenging his Tory critics to "put up or shut up," Major has proved his point: His opponents lack the parliamentary strength to dethrone him.

It was, as he stated in his victory speech, a "very clear-cut decision." His serious Cabinet rivals, from the Newt-ish right-winger Michael Portillo to the more pro-European Michael Heseltine, did not have the guts to attempt the fatal back-stabbing operation they must have so longed to carry out, and his one-time heir-apparent, the ambitious Chancellor Kenneth Clarke, looks like nothing so much as a bloated blancmange. Former Welsh Secretary John Redwood, the one person who seemed serious about mounting a challenge to the Leader, ended up falling to the Machiavellian schemes of Portillo and Heseltine's supporters, who evidently calculated that their men are best placed to assume leadership if—as is widely expected—the Conservatives lose to Labor in the next general election, most likely two years away.

The Conservatives are unlikely to turn around the 20-30 percent deficit they face in the opinion polls. The party is only marginally less likely to suffer an



absolutely crushing humiliation at the general election. Major and his supporters have claimed that holding a leadership contest allowed all factions of the party to "clear the air," to have a public dusting-down of policy differences and then to return to the important business of clinging to power for its own sake. In reality, the party is as divided this week as it was last month over Europe, over social policy and over the very role of government in a post-industrial society.

Major's leadership election gambit, analysts in Britain seem to agree, won't save the Conservatives from defeat. But it may give Major an opportunity to grab a little distinction for what has been an embattled premiership. Like Gladstone more than a hundred years before, he desperately wants to be remembered in the annals of British politics as the man who solved the centuries-long "Irish Question." As Gerry Holtham, Director of the London-based Institute for Public Policy Research, puts it: "It's probably the case that he does identify [Ireland] as the way he's going to get into the history books."

Major wants the Nobel Peace Prize, and this election has given him breathing space to put most of his effort into this area. Indeed, as was the case in Nixon's detente with China, a settlement with Ireland may only be possible if crafted by a right-wing, hawkish political party. If John Major then proceeds, in 1996 or 1997, to lead his party to its worst-ever defeat in a general election, well, at least history will include in its footnotes one positive word about him.

—Sasha Abramsky

## GEORGE SELDES, 1890-1995

The fact that I'm alive and healthy today may be due to journalist George Seldes. Raised in a family that subscribed to *In Fact*, Seldes' muckraking newsletter, I can still vividly recall coming across, at the age of 15, his landmark story revealing the link between smoking and cancer—and exposing the tobacco industry's attempt to suppress that link. Seldes cited studies showing that people who smoked two packs of cigarettes a day took 20 years off their life expectancy, and that those who smoked one pack took 10 years off. That story (and the fact that my mother was a compulsive smoker whose habit gave me headaches) made me a life-long foe of smoking.

Now, 54 years later, George Seldes has died. Seldes, who was 104 when he passed away July 2, was a direct ancestor of *In These Times* in many ways. Between 1940 and 1950, he published *In Fact*, which reported news the commercial press chose to ignore. At its peak, it reached 176,000 readers.

Seldes spent his early childhood in Alliance, N.J., a utopian colony founded by his father—who as secretary of the Friends of Russian Freedom helped raise money to support the 1905 uprising against the czar. The younger Seldes went to work in 1909, at 19, as a \$3.50-a-week reporter for the *Pittsburgh Leader*. In 1916, with war raging in Europe, Seldes quit the *Leader* and went to London to begin a 25-year career as a freelance writer and foreign correspondent. After the war he was hired by the *Chicago Tribune* and reported on the Russian civil war from Moscow, until he was expelled for his dispatches on the Bolshevik purge of anarchists, social revolutionaries and other political opponents. Then he went to Italy—from which he was expelled in 1925 for his coverage of Mussolini and the rise of Italian fascism.

In 1928, Seldes quit the *Tribune* and returned to the United States to resume his career as a freelance writer. In the books and articles that followed, Seldes exposed the suppression of news and the corruption of the press by business

## MEDIA WATCH

By Jennifer Gonnerman

### Net of muck

As more and more people are plugging into the Internet, the result may be more—and better—muckraking. This month, new resources on the Net make it much easier to follow a candidate's money trail. *Mother Jones* magazine and Project Vote Smart, a nonpartisan clearinghouse of political information in Corvallis, Ore., are each putting extensive campaign finance records online, hoping to inspire more reporters to do investigative journalism.

On July 31, Project Vote Smart will launch "Vote Smart Web." It includes detailed campaign contribution records, a directory of all political information available online and the voting records of more than 20,000 candidates nationwide. Now, every Net surfer will be able to compare politicians' campaign contributors with their votes on key issues—and find out if their local representative is selling political favors.

*Mother Jones* has also recently put federal and gubernatorial campaign contributions online with Mojo Wire, its newly improved World Wide Web site. One feature, "Coin-Operated Congress," lists all individual and political action committee (PAC) contributions made to congressional candidates from 1991 to 1994.

Also included is what may be the first attempt at interactive muckraking. Mojo Wire features the previously unpublished list of GOPAC's 159 major contributors. Once headed by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, GOPAC has



spent millions of dollars since the mid-'80s to get Republicans elected, but it has refused to release the names of all of its contributors. A leaked list has made its way to reporters, but it isn't comprehensive. *Mother Jones* hopes Net surfers will fill in the blanks with information about contributors' corporate affiliations and special interests.

Mojo Wire's first two days drew 580 users, but no juicy leads. However, optimism prevails. Says *Mother Jones* staffer Joel Truher, "We're hoping people will have experiences that will point to inaccuracies in the Federal Election Commission reports that could be construed as hiding information." *Mother Jones* already has staffers ready to sift through responses and verify leads.

This increased access to campaign finance records may prod more reporters to follow the money trail—and investigate politicians who steer legislation on behalf of their biggest contributors. "If a lot of people have access to this online, they're going to wonder if the information is missing ... every time they read a news story," says Margaret Engle of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Responsive Politics. "One of the reasons we are doing this," Truher admits, "is that we think many reporters are underreporting the things we're talking about."

Others, however, are skeptical that the Internet will make muckrakers out of political reporters. According to Andy Lehen of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, "Computers are not going to make you a good reporter."

interests. In a 1978 interview with Derek Shearer in *ITT*, Seldes recalled that publishers were less than enthusiastic about his exposés. "From the time I began criticizing the American press and publishing documents that it could not refute or even answer, an attack began," he said. His book *Lords of the Press* was ignored by most reviewers, and an old colleague, Edwin James, who had become managing editor of the *New York Times*, sent word down that no book by Seldes would ever be reviewed by the *Times*. The management of the *Chicago Tribune* had Seldes' name removed from a bronze plaque commemorating its foreign correspondents.

The first issue of *In Fact* was sent out in 1940 to 6,000 subscribers, most of them AFL or CIO union locals. In the following years, Seldes took on a diverse range of high-profile targets, from *Reader's Digest* to the National Association of Manufacturers. In 1948, he visited Yugoslavia and interviewed Marshal Tito, who had just declared his independence from Moscow. In a series of articles, he supported Tito's independent socialism. Then in 1950 he took a critical view of both sides in the Korean War. These actions angered the Communist Party, and as Seldes told *ITT*, "Immediately, angry cancellations of subscriptions began pouring in." And, he recalled, "They threw my newsletter out of the so-called progressive bookshops."

But the greatest pressure on Seldes came from the chilling effects of the Cold War. By the late '40s, labor unions and liberals were canceling subscriptions in droves. With circulation plummeting, Seldes suspended publication in October of 1950, which, not entirely by coincidence, is when I.F. Stone began publishing his own newsletter modeled after *In Fact*. To help him get started, and with typical generosity, Seldes gave Stone a gift of his mailing list.

—James Weinstein

## HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan





## PALESTINIAN PEACENIK

*Mubarak Awad brings peace  
to the Occupied Territories*

It's not easy to promote nonviolence to people who have spent nearly three generations in one of the world's most protracted and violence-ridden ethnic conflicts. But the nonviolent tactics that followers of Mahatma Gandhi used to overthrow the British occupation of India retain their force today, says Palestinian peace activist Mubarak Awad. In a society that Awad sees as increasingly "worshipping the gun," active pacifism is a political ideal that often falls on deaf ears. To promote it, Awad and other peace activists have had to appeal to principled courage: "We say, 'Okay, see if you have the guts to walk without a gun past someone with a gun.'"

Awad's nonviolent strategy was tested last January, when he led some 100 Palestinians and Israelis onto land seized from Arabs by residents of Ma'al Amos, a small Jewish settlement midway between Bethlehem and Hebron. The settlers had bulldozed the tent dwellings of several Bedouin families and three hills of olive trees, barley and wheat that had been cultivated by three local Palestinian families for generations. Tension was already at a high pitch because only days before, Hussein al-Rashaide, a charismatic local activist and a member of one of the families whose land was expropriated, was accidentally killed by a land mine set by the Israeli army.

Awad had taken pains to ensure that the protest would be nonviolent: Protesters were forbidden to carry rocks or guns. But when some of the protesters set fire to an empty camp trailer on the site—an act Awad later denounced—Israeli settlers opened fired on the crowd, sending the marchers scrambling for cover. When soldiers arrived, they bused the demonstration's Israeli participants away and detained Palestinians at the site. They jailed two

ETC.

By Joel Bleifuss

## The NAFTA shaft

In the November 14, 1994 *In These Times*, correspondent Peter White reported on the disturbing disposition of the first case tried under NAFTA's labor side agreement. In that case, the National Administrative Office (NAO)—the American agency created to enforce NAFTA's labor provisions—decided that it lacked the authority to rule against two American multinationals charged with mistreating their Mexican workers.

Now, a recent case has shown that even when the NAO does take action, it possesses few powers to back up its edicts.

Last year, workers at Sony's five maquiladoras in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, protested a company decision requiring them to work Sundays. The official, state-connected trade union, CTM, which represents the 1,700 workers at the five plants, sided with the company. Attempts by Sony workers to vote in new union leadership were thwarted by electoral fraud. Subsequent demonstrations against that fraud were broken up by riot police who clubbed protesting workers.

The workers, with the assistance of the American Friends Service Committee and other groups, filed a complaint with the NAO. (Interestingly, the Mexican workers did not receive the support of the AFL-CIO, which has close ties to the corrupt CTM.) The case was heard last February, and on



April 11 the NAO ruled in the workers' favor. But that ruling hasn't accomplished much. The NAO, which took the strongest action possible, was only able to require that U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich "consult" his counterpart in Mexico—Labor Secretary Santiago Oñate—and ask him to respond formally to the complaints that Mexico has failed to enforce its labor laws.

Pharis Harvey, the director of the International Labor Rights Fund, one of the groups supporting the Sony workers, says the decision "highlights the overall inadequacy of the labor side agreement itself and the need for renegotiation of a stronger agreement."

## Onward and downward

Wages in the United States fell by 2.7 percent between March 1994 and March 1995 according to the U.S. Labor Department. This decline in inflation-adjusted wages coincided with a 14 percent rise in corporate profits. "It signals a dangerous shift in the distribution of income from ordinary working Americans to the very wealthy who own most of America's financial assets," said U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich. As a press release from the Labor Department noted, between January 1 and June 7, the volume of trade on the stock market increased by 16 percent, or \$673 billion. This is enough to give a \$5,100 bonus to every American worker.

Palestinians for setting fire to the first trailer and another trailer that had burst into flames on a hillside far from the demonstrators. In the end, Awad's nonviolent tactics seem to have paid off: In what is a rare occurrence in the Occupied Territories, the army removed the Jewish settlers from the hills.

In 1985, Awad and a handful of other West Bank activists founded the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence (PCSN) and devised 120 options for a nonviolent uprising against the Israeli occupation. PCSN activists traveled to villages and refugee camps throughout the Occupied Territories, distributing Awad's pamphlets, speeches and Arabic translations of pacifist classics. But it was not always so easy for him to get a hearing, Awad says, "because I was completely against the armed struggle [against Israeli occupation]." He persisted nonetheless, and by late 1987 many of his tactics—such as withholding taxes, boycotting Israeli products, obstructing bulldozers and planting olive trees on land seized for Israeli settlements—had gained widespread acceptance in the Palestinian intifada.

Despite his strict refusal to condone violence, the Israeli government branded Awad a terrorist. In 1988, he was transported in shackles to an airplane headed for America, earning him a reputation as the "Palestinian Gandhi" in the international press. He was exiled at the insistence of the Israeli government, which claimed he had forfeited his residency rights after spending 13 years in the United States. He studied social work and psychology here, married an American Quaker, Nancy Nye, gained U.S. citizenship and started a family.

Israel now lets Awad visit for three months at a time, and he takes eight or nine brief trips home each year to call on friends, relatives and PCSN offices. The center's staff still works with other Palestinian and Israeli groups to organize demonstrations, peace camps for Arab and Jewish teenagers, rapprochement between adults, workshops on women's rights and planning for independence.

In October, the PCSN launched the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Elections with funding from the Washington, D.C.-based National Endowment for Democracy. The center hosts seminars in which local faction representatives meet to debate the peace process and to learn about human rights and election procedures. Awad insists that democratic dialogue must include people of all philosophies—even Hamas members who espouse continued violence. "It's our idea to push the factions to have democratic elections and to make them [into] parties," Awad says.

A small photograph of Yasser Arafat's and Yitzhak Rabin's famous 1993 handshake adorns a wall of the center's office, symbolizing the hope that the PLO's renunciation of violence has restored. But Awad concedes that the PCSN's work is as tough under the Oslo Accords as it was a decade ago. "The Palestinian people are very angry," he says. "People see that after the peace process things are getting worse." He recites a familiar litany of complaints: confiscated land, extrajudicial imprisonment, curfews, shootings, beatings. "We are opposing the things the Israelis are doing to us, because they are non-democratic, and we are opposing some of the things the Palestinian Authority is doing," he says. In particular, Awad complains that Palestinian police in Gaza round up critics together with suspected terrorists to be tried in military courts.

Awad says he learned nonviolence as a child when his mother taught him to pray for the man who killed his father in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. And today he remains passionately committed to nonviolent resistance. "Every human life is important," Awad says, "And we don't have the right to destroy it."

—Nadia Oehlsen

**LABOR**

# War zone

# B

rian and Tyna McDuffie, a middle-aged couple from Decatur, Ill., could easily serve as the poster family for the harshness of contemporary American blue-collar life.

*In Decatur, management is unleashing its entire anti-union arsenal. Can America's labor movement survive the onslaught?*

By David Moberg  
DECATUR, ILL.

Since last June, Brian, a stocky electrician partial to the red T-shirts that have become the emblem of labor militancy in this central Illinois city, has been on strike against Caterpillar over the construction equipment maker's hostile treatment of its UAW workforce. Although Cat has been consistently profitable for years, the company has pressed the union for concessions in a series of increasingly bitter contract negotiations. In April 1992, after a 163-day walkout, Caterpillar threatened to permanently replace its striking workers, and the union called off the strike.

Once the workers returned to the plants, however, they began a "work-

to-rule" campaign, with many UAW members doing only the minimal work required in their contract. Like other union members, Brian faced steady harassment from Cat management. Workers wearing union T-shirts and buttons were disciplined. Cat's opposition has been so extreme that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has filed 167 complaints against Caterpillar—the most ever lodged against a single company in a labor dispute. With Caterpillar showing no signs of backing down, UAW members walked out again last June. (Because the current walkout is over Cat's unfair labor practices, the company is prohibited from permanently replacing the strikers.)

Five years ago Tyna, then a divorced mother of four, abandoned three minimum-wage jobs to take a unionized \$11.50-an-hour job at A.E. Staley, a leading maker of corn syrup and starch owned by British conglomerate Tate & Lyle. When Staley let its contract with the union expire in 1992, the local's leaders figured that management

wanted workers to strike so the company could permanently replace them and break the union. Instead, the workers stayed on the job, mounted a work-to-rule campaign, and simultaneously launched an attack on Staley's corporate and financial allies. Production plummeted, and in June 1993 Staley locked out Tyna and her 760 fellow workers.

After a stint driving a school bus, Tyna got a job at the Bridgestone/Firestone tire plant last spring. Two months later, the plant's 1,250 workers—members of the United Rubber Workers—also went on strike. In January, the company informed Tyna and her co-workers that they had been permanently replaced. In May the union called off the strike, but the company has offered jobs to only 185 strikers, and Tyna is now studying computers in hopes of finding a new career.

Brian and Tyna, whose early dates were on the Cat picket lines and who got married a few days after the Bridgestone/Firestone strike started, remain undaunted. They travel around the country as "road warriors" spreading the word about Decatur. Why do they do it? "Part of it is because I've read history—and understand why I have what I have," says Tyna, a surprisingly cheery woman who claims she was ignorant of unions until she met Brian. "Part of it is my kids: I want a good job for me, but mostly I'm fighting for my kids and the people who fought and died for what I have."

For several years now, this gently declining and normally somnolent industrial city of 84,000 has been a labor war zone. During most of the past year roughly one-third of Decatur's manufacturing workforce has been either locked-out or on strike. In an era when unions are increasingly reluctant to confront employers, even a single major



labor dispute is rare; but three in the same small city is extraordinary. Because of the intensity of this conflict, Decatur has emerged as a proving ground, both for corporations attempting to establish a new regime of workplace exploitation and for unions trying to survive in an era of economic globalization.

At this point, the corporations clearly have the upper hand. The Bridgestone/Firestone Rubber Workers—who in June merged with the Steelworkers union—ended their strike in May with no contract and little hope that most of the 756 remaining strikers would ever return to their jobs. A dispirited band of Staley workers forced a vote in mid-July on a company proposal that union leaders said was worse than the contract rejected before the lockout, though it did offer a special pension and severance package to tempt workers who had given up hope of returning to Staley. And Caterpillar has cobbled together a temporary workforce that is generating record profits despite the strike.

Nevertheless, all three unions—even Bridgestone's Steelworkers—have continued to fight. To mark the second anniversary of the Staley lockout and the first anniversary of the Cat and Bridgestone/Firestone strikes, roughly 5,000 workers and their supporters rallied in late June. Campaigns to pressure the companies on new fronts continue: The workers at Bridgestone—which is Japanese-owned—protested outside Japanese consulates and at the Indianapolis 500 even after ending their strike. Newly elected UAW president Stephen Yokich has announced that he will resume bargaining with Caterpillar, though he has given no hint about how he plans to bring the company to the table. Most dramatically, despite receiving only \$60 a week during the Staley lockout, 57 percent of the workers rejected the company's contract proposal. The union immediately stepped up its campaign to pressure PepsiCo. to stop buying products from Staley.

Before the labor disputes started, all three companies were profitable and growing more so. Nevertheless, the companies demanded contracts inferior to industry standards and forced their unions into defensive postures.

Though their demands vary, in general the three companies want a free hand to subcontract any work—usually to lower-wage, non-union firms that undermine the security of union jobs. Managers at all three companies want to institute 12-hour shifts that require workers to rotate between working days and nights. Managers are also pursuing schemes that would reduce pay and time off and curtail health and other benefits. And they want to reduce union power in pressing for grievances, enforcing safety rules and representing workers.

Many workers fear that the long days and rotating shifts, which are likely to be accompanied by mandatory overtime, will severely disrupt their family and community life. "If they have you on their schedule you won't have a life outside Staley's," argues Staley union bargaining chairman Allain Ferris.

The proposals are also arguably bad for the companies in the long run. Workplace studies demonstrate that long hours and swing shifts impair productivity, decrease safety and damage workers' health—especially pressing concerns for the older, high-seniority workers who remain at the downsized Decatur plants. Management consultant Charles Krone, who oversaw Staley's now-defunct labor-management cooperation program, criticizes Staley's shift proposals as artificial, immature and ill-conceived. Krone believes Staley's proposals have needlessly alienated a "pretty damn motivated, productive workforce."

All of the companies claim that they are trying to make their operations more flexible in order to compete in the global economy. But American workers already work longer hours on average than employees in any other major industrial country—including Japan. In recent years, U.S. workers have scored smaller wage and benefit gains than employees in most other industrial countries. And manufacturing labor costs in the United States have been falling compared to most competitors. As a result, the United States is becoming a cheap labor country: total hourly compensation in manufacturing is 60 percent higher in Germany and 25 percent higher in Japan.

Less-skilled workers are clearly the losers in today's job market, but having skills—as most Decatur workers do—or higher education is no guarantee of security or rising pay. The real winners appear to be mainly a thin stratum of managers, some elite professionals, and the owners of capital—stocks, bonds and privately held businesses. Though most small entrepreneurs and white-collar workers still identify with business in general, the current corporate "restructuring" often chews up many of those allies. At the Decatur Caterpillar plant, a group of salaried workers



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recently wrote an unusual letter to Chairman Donald Fites protesting Cat's recent abandonment of promised pay increases as a "slap in the face" to workers who have had no time off since the strike began.

Tyna McDuffie's ex-husband, Bob Doddek, an engineer at Staley for 23 years, learned a hard lesson about company loyalty. In 1992, during a purge of 250 salaried workers, Doddek's whole department was eliminated. Staley felt it could cut costs by contracting out its engineering work. "We could do a better job and do it more cheaply," Doddek says, "Now they spend money redoing things, taking chances, not putting it right the first time." Doddek says he was "disgusted" with Staley. Like other critics of the new work regime in Decatur, he claims that the company is making the workplace more dangerous even as it trumpets its commitment to safety.

Another salaried Staley worker was fired and then told as he was leaving that he could reapply to do the same job through an outside contractor—at half his previous pay. "Morale is at a low ebb," he notes, speaking anonymously out of fear of reprisal. "Everyone is overworked and unsatisfied with the longer hours."

Decatur is a case study not only in the imposition of this new uncertain work regime—known euphemistically as "restructuring"—but also in the ability of unions to resist. The corporations have taken serious hits, but thus far neither militancy nor ingenuity has been a match for the deep pockets of far-flung multinationals and the pro-business tilt of labor law. Though the war isn't over yet, there are some sobering—and inspiring—lessons for workers and their unions about the perils of labor-management cooperation, the limitations of strikes, the potency of new tactics, and the importance of solidarity.

Initially, all three unions enthusiastically took part in workplace cooperation schemes that boosted productivity, changed work rules, and modified contracts—even though the changes slashed employment by half or more. Several years ago, the Labor Department presented a plaque to the Bridgestone/Firestone local for engaging in cooperative "win-win" bargaining with the company. Over the past year that plaque has been turned against the wall.

Betrayal of that cooperation was bad enough. What's been worse, however, is the way that the earlier cooperation strengthened the corporation's hand. For example, in the interest of serving customers better, the UAW had agreed never to strike Cat's critical parts-supply division, which has continued to operate through both strikes. At Staley, workers shared their informal knowledge of how best to operate the complex machinery with supervisors, who then used it to train strikebreakers.

"We poured our hearts into that program, because we had pride, integrity and concern for the company—and our customers," says Dave Watts, president of Paperworkers Local 7837. "And all along they had plans to use that against us, input after input, page after page of detailed

instructions, clear directives for training scabs. There's a message in that for workers and organized labor." Watts still thinks labor-management cooperation makes sense in theory, but at the very least he believes workers must have much more power to protect themselves.

All three conflicts highlight the weakness of the strike as a tactic in fighting hostile multinationals. Even the UAW, which is in the strongest position, has limited leverage over Cat—it represents only about 16 percent of the company's worldwide workforce. And American labor law clearly makes the strike a perilous venture. The specter of permanent replacements has loomed over all the conflicts—and actually materialized at Bridgestone/Firestone. A key reason that the Steelworkers returned to Bridgestone was to head off a vote by replacements to decertify the union altogether.

Although the NLRB is now in Democratic hands, it affords little protection during a walkout. If the NLRB last year had ruled—as, again, it quite reasonably could have done—that Staley was illegally engaging in an aggressive lockout rather than a defense against sabotage, the Staley workers might now have the upper hand. Likewise, if the regional office of the NLRB had supported the Rubber Workers' quite plausible charges of unfair labor practices last spring, the company would not have been allowed to employ permanent replacements. Their strike might still be viable, if weak.

But even when companies are prohibited from hiring permanent replacements, there's no guarantee that a strike will be successful. Both Cat and Staley are operating with temporary replacements, and Bridgestone did for half a year—demonstrating that corporations don't need permanent replacements to maintain production.

Clearly, labor needs new tactics, and the unions—especially the Paperworkers—in Decatur have employed a variety of innovative strategies. Inside the plant, Staley and later Cat workers "worked to rule" and organized demonstrations of worker solidarity. In Decatur the three unions over the past year have tried to coordinate strategy and have jointly mobilized large marches and rallies. Staley workers, initially advised by independent consultants Ray Rogers and Jerry Tucker, took the lead in raising financial support for locked-out families and sending workers out as "road warriors" to generate support for the strike outside of Decatur. Staley workers (and to a lesser degree those at Caterpillar) have won support from labor and political leaders in dozens of countries, from Brazil to Russia and throughout Western Europe.

To varying degrees, the unions found new economic pressure points beyond disrupting production. They have challenged the companies in stockholder meetings and pressured financial backers. The UAW headed to Wall Street, and Staley workers pressured local banks. The Paperworkers persuaded several big corporate customers, notably Miller Brewing Company, to drop Staley as a supplier. They now believe PepsiCo. is close to making a similar



decision. The unions attacked tax breaks for the companies and vigorously pressed complaints about corporate violations of environmental and health and safety regulations. Last spring the unions formed an independent political organization to run labor-friendly candidates for local office. In a stunning upset, union-backed Terry Howley won the nonpartisan mayoral election against a conservative candidate with heavy financial backing from the big corporations. Another labor candidate gained a seat on the city council. That vote has shifted the balance of power in a city government that had been decidedly unfriendly to the unions.

Yet, skeptics might say, none of this has worked. If "working" means achieving a clear victory, that is true. But the tactics haven't been futile. They have cost even these profitable giants large sums they would otherwise have earned. And the unions have imposed untold long-term costs. Cat, for example, is the only big diesel-engine producer not to offer a new model this year, since its technical workers are now manning production lines. In developing a support network, the Staley workers especially have helped to reinvigorate a spirit of solidarity in the American labor movement.

And many of these tactics would have been far more effective had they been implemented sooner. What if the unions had earlier used their clout to elect sympathetic local officials? What if the UAW or Rubber Workers had mounted an inside campaign before their economic strikes? What if the campaigns to attack Miller and Pepsi's contracts with Staley had been ready to launch early on? These speculations are not criticisms of these unions; compared to most conflicts, the Staley workers extensively researched and elaborately planned their alternative strategies relatively early. But when unions know that a majority of employers are seriously considering—if not already planning—assaults on them, mobilizing all available weaponry in advance is critical. The war zone

could be anywhere and erupt at any time.

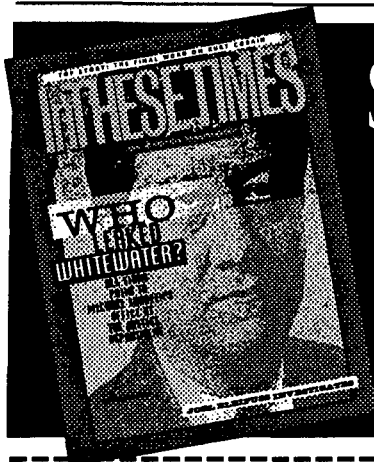
Employers, who typically initiate the fight, certainly plan well in advance, and they often work together. There is considerable circumstantial evidence indicating that Decatur's corporations have collaborated closely in the fight against labor. A mysterious slurry supply pipe was constructed between Staley and food giant Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) just before the lockout. And union members note that meetings were held involving executives of Cat, Staley, Firestone and ADM several years ago. The suspicion that companies have been working together was reinforced in July, when a federal grand jury subpoenaed records of ADM, Staley and the multinational grain dealer, Cargill, as part of an investigation of antitrust collusion and price-fixing.

Of course, the companies also have had the considerable advantage of having their union-hostile workplaces subsidized by local taxpayers. All three employers are in a state enterprise zone that makes them eligible for a wide range of tax abatements. According to research by Staley striker Art Dhermy, Staley received \$512,000 in local property tax breaks in 1993, a typical year. Staley also is exempted from utility taxes (maybe worth another half million dollars a year, Dhermy estimates) and certain sales taxes. To get the latter two tax breaks, Staley promised to maintain a workforce more than twice the size of its current payroll.

Nevertheless, the damage of the protracted strikes might have been mitigated if organized labor had exhibited more solidarity from the start. Instead, members of many building trades unions crossed—and continue to cross—the picket lines as contract workers, often doing both maintenance and production work. Only after Teamster President Ron Carey used his influence did the local old-guard Teamster officials respect Staley and other picket lines. The Illinois State AFL-CIO initially shunned the Staley workers because their local had stopped paying dues to protest the state federation's endorsement of a Republican for governor. The national AFL-CIO also provided little



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support to the Decatur workers. A high-profile visit by Decatur workers to this winter's AFL-CIO executive council meeting did finally prompt President Lane Kirkland and many other top union leaders to make their journey to Decatur. But the executive council gave little consideration to Decatur workers' proposals for a centralized union strike fund. While the Rubber Workers' strike fund ran out of money, and Staley workers have subsisted on \$60 a week plus contributions from supporters, the UAW was rich enough to boost strike pay to \$300 a week. Without that higher pay, the Cat strike might very well have collapsed by now. Higher lockout pay probably would have prevented the "back to work" movement among locked-out Staley workers from gaining force this spring.

"It's unfortunate American labor didn't get behind this struggle early on," laments Mike Griffin, a skilled tradesman who has guided much of the Staley workers' worldwide solidarity efforts. "They let their bureaucracy and protocol get in the way of supporting rank-and-file workers in the trenches fighting for their lives."

One of the main reasons that workers do not join unions today—or even think about organized labor—is that they're skeptical that unions have the power to solve their problems. As long as unions fail to join together—forgetting that "an injury to one is an injury to all," as the old slogan goes—those skeptics will be right. Employers everywhere will be more emboldened to pursue restructuring. And organizing will be more difficult for everyone.

Labor laws and court interpretations have greatly diminished the rights of workers to act in solidarity with others: secondary boycotts, sympathy strikes, refusals to handle struck goods and many other potential acts of solidarity are forbidden. Yet unions have not even begun to exhaust the potential of actions that are legal, let alone push the boundaries imposed by law.

Labor could have made Decatur a rallying point for a national political campaign. Concerned about family values? Then it's time to rein in corporations that impose disruptive work schedules and slash wages, not because their survival is at stake, but simply because they can get away with it. Union leaders could have argued that what America really needed—instead of middle-class tax cuts—was an end to middle-class pay cuts. Want cooperation at work? Give workers the power to be equal partners and protect their interests. Unions could make the case to the vast unorganized majority that "empowerment" does not mean being tossed alone into the stormy seas of the market but having the right to act together and have a voice at work.

If labor, or the Democrats, hope to revive themselves in the coming years, they must embrace and trumpet that clear alternative. That, at least, is one message from Decatur, the hottest front in a war being waged in quieter ways against workers everywhere. ◀



# **E NVIRONMENT**

## The forest for the trees

O

*America's  
forests seem to  
be thriving,  
but serious  
threats to their  
health remain.*

By Will Nixon

n any given day, I can ride a train north from Manhattan for little more than an hour, step off at a trail head, and feel I've entered a primeval wilderness. Here, just 40 miles north of the city, lie the Highlands, an ancient range of stony hills that crosses the Hudson River. Gilded by God's sunlight and darkened by nature's mysterious forests, they were featured in some of Washington Irving's folk tales and pictured in several Hudson River School landscape paintings.

Although the forests were leveled several times during the 19th century, today they're again blanketed with trees. On a recent hike, I found wild roses growing from the summit rocks and turkey vultures slowly surfing the ridge-top breeze. I enjoyed my glorious day in the woods, as I always do, and the next morning I returned refreshed to my computer to

write about America's environmental crisis.

Many people must share my conundrum, spending time outdoors in places alive with nature, yet reading stories of ecological gloom. It's a paradox that environmentalists should take more seriously, especially now that writers like Gregg Easterbrook claim the eco-crisis has been wildly exaggerated. Indeed, in his massive tome, *A Moment on the Earth*, Easterbrook insists that "the Western world today is on the verge of the greatest ecological renewal that mankind has ever known." Forests, including the Highlands, are among his prime examples.

Our forests have never been Edenic wilderness preserves. Native Americans cultivated them with fires, which encouraged the growth of wild berries. They fertilized valleys and prairies for crops, and they cleared openings for game animals, such as bison, which roamed as far east as Massachusetts. By the mid-19th century, however, European settlers were clearing forests with devastating efficiency. "Between 1850 and 1910, farmers

cleared about 190 million acres of forest for crops and pasture, an amount greater than the total over the previous 250 years of settlement," notes Douglas MacCleery, a historian with the U.S. Forest Service. Americans also cut timber for fuel, fences, railroad ties and buildings. Wildfires raged through the forests as well, destroying 20 to 50 million acres a year into the 1930s, compared with 3 to 5 million acres today. The horror stories that we now hear about rain-forests have their antecedents in our own history.

From 1865 onward, conservationists warned of an impending "wood famine," and our forests finally hit bottom in 1920 or so. The federal government began buying degraded forest land early in this century for restoration, and society stopped needing so many trees. American industry and homes switched from wood to fossil fuels, for example, and American transportation abandoned railroad ties for asphalt. In the past 75 years, our forest land has fluctuated from 732 million acres to 762 million acres to 737 million acres today. These figures don't match the 1,044 million acres of forest in 1630, but they certainly suggest stability rather than crisis. In the East in particular, forests have grown back dramatically in this century, covering vast tracts of former farmland. By the '60s and '70s, MacCleery notes, "the pattern of forest, fields and pastures [in some areas] was similar to that prior to 1800, its appearance much like it must have been prior to the American Revolution."

Easterbrook simply expands upon this story of nature's resilience to inform us that "old growth" forests in the Northwest will return within 100 to 200 years, the timber companies replant so enthusiastically that 30 percent more young trees are growing each year in the country than old trees are being cut, and that "today, nearly all North Ameri-



can forestry trends are positive." The real problem, he suggests, is that "yuppies are annoyed when slow timber trucks tie up the two-lane highways of Pacific Coast rustic areas, blocking Saabs and Volvos heading for ski areas."

Apparently, Easterbrook spent a day in the woods hosted by the Weyerhaeuser paper company. Last February, Reed Noss, a prominent conservation biologist, and Edward LaRoe and Michael Scott of the National Biological Service

(NBS) released the first scientific review of endangered ecosystems in the United States. The NBS researchers found scarcely any new, improved forest preserve. Rather, they found a continent that has been overrun and altered. Of the 261 major ecosystems in the United States, some 126 are endangered or threatened. Huge tracts of prairies, wetlands and forests have been replaced by farms, suburbs and tree plantations. Our streams, especially, have been harmed.

Only 2 percent of them remain pristine enough to meet the standards for our federal "wild and scenic" rivers program. Some 81 percent of our native fish suffer the effects of water pollution, dams and other depredations. Ten percent of our freshwater mussels have become extinct since 1900, and another 73 percent are now imperiled. "To the casual observer, the riverine habitat still exists; its degradation is often apparent only to those who know aquatic ecology," the report notes. Much the same could be said of the way our forests appear to the untrained eye.

The forests in the United States today are not the same as in 1630. The great sea of red and white pines around the Great Lakes has shrunk to puddles of pines amid the younger hardwood forests. The long-leaf pines that grew in a broad swath across 40 percent of the Southern coastal plain are gone from all but 2 percent of their original range, replaced by plantations of the loblolly and slash pine preferred by timber companies.

Even "conservation" practices have sometimes hurt. After decades without natural fires, ponderosa pines that grew on grassy savannas across the drier slopes of the West have been crowded out by dense stands of Douglas firs. In the green Northeast, NBS researchers found drastic declines of some varieties of forest, especially by waterways and coasts, such as Atlantic white cedar swamps, pine barrens and floodplain forests. And everywhere they note the loss of virgin old-growth forest, something that doesn't pop back up like toast in 100 or 200 years.

In *Wild Earth* magazine, Robert Leverett recently reported on ancient trees that have been found in remote areas of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. They included a red maple more than 23 feet around, a northern red oak 18 feet around and tulip trees 160 to 180 feet tall. "The 'virgin' forests of the Great Smoky Mountains," Leverett writes, "reflect the culmination of forest building processes that do not express themselves in 80 years, or even 200 years." It takes 500 to 750 years to produce "the composition and structure of the old-growth forests of the Smokies." Consequently, the Eastern forests that Easterbrook sees as signs of environmental resilience would better be seen as false green façades of the landscape before European settlement.

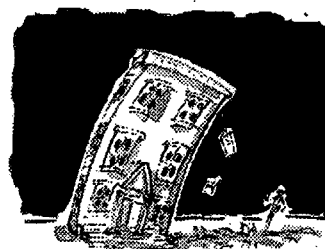
A final issue that the optimists neglect is the actual state of the woods. In a forthcoming book, *The Dying of the Trees*, journalist Charles Little explains that an unprecedented number of blights are slowly but inexorably killing such trees as the flowering dogwood, hemlock, butternut, sugar maple, red mulberry and American beech. Until this century, only one tree had vanished from the United States, the franklinia, a species last found in the wild in 1790. In the 1910s and 1920s, a blight erased the common chestnut tree from the Eastern forests, and since the 1940s, Dutch elm disease has ravaged the popular elm trees that once lined many suburban streets. Now these blights have multiplied, most likely abetted by air pollution. In the "mixed mesophytic forest," an ecosystem that covers much of the Southern Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee, one of the oldest and most diverse temperate forests on earth, nearly 80 trees and shrub species may be in decline because of ground-level ozone pollution and acid rain, says Orie Loucks, a scientist at Miami University in Ohio. Such grim figures, Little writes, have led researchers to "describe the mixed mesophytic as a forest with AIDS—a metaphor that concerns not only trees but all the myriad species that make up a forest ecosystem."

On a clear day from the summits in the Highlands, I can often see Manhattan beyond the waves of forest ridges. It could be a tanker ship loaded with silver towers, a visitor briefly docked on our green land. I love this illusion, but I have learned not to take it too seriously. Down in the forest, I know, the trees are still young and thin, the farms won't vanish for centuries under the earth, and the deer roam everywhere without wolves to balance their population. It's a forest, but it's also an abused landscape wrapped in green. The environmental movement needs to explain the forest for the trees, lest the public fall for Gregg Easterbrook's premature celebration. ▴

Will Nixon is a frequent contributor to *In These Times*.

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**B L A C K A M E R I C A**

# Down by law

**C**oncluding its 1994-1995 term with a hard charge to the right, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered rulings against majority-black voting districts, affirmative action and school desegregation while sanctioning random drug testing of students, public funding of a student Christian magazine and a Ku Klux Klan protest. Some rulings were a bit more moderate, but the current term clearly revealed the court's conservative trajectory.

*The Supreme Court strikes down racially gerrymandered congressional districts.*

By Salim Muwakkil

The ruling that has caused the most concern is the June 29 5-4 decision that the state of Georgia must redraw its 11th Congressional District in a manner that omits race as the "predominant" factor. The court agreed with five white voters who argued in

a suit that the state violated their rights under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment by drawing the districts to ensure a black majority.

Although the ruling only pertains to Georgia's 11th Congressional District, currently being represented by black Democrat Cynthia McKinney, it is likely to inspire a host of similar challenges throughout the country. Lawsuits challenging congressional seats already have been filed in Florida, North Carolina and Texas. Predictions vary, but some analysts believe that at least 10 minority-dominant districts could be invalidated.

Writing for the court, Justice Anthony Kennedy argued that "just as the state may not, absent extraordinary justification, segregate citizens on the basis of race in its public parks, buses, golf course, beaches and schools, so it may not separate its citizens into different voting districts on the basis of race."

Kennedy's argument seems marred by an obvious lack of historical perspective. How, for example, can the court equate exclusionary racial considerations with compensatory efforts designed to include the once-excluded? The reasoning clearly is inconsistent, but those flaws of logic apparently have been ignored—although Justice John Paul Stevens pointed them out in his dissent.

The court's willingness to disregard historical context for the sake of the conservative ideology of race neutrality provokes fears among many black activists that we may be repeating a particularly nasty period of the country's past. The ruling was "the first step in the resegregation of American electoral democracy," said Wade Henderson, legal director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "If race can't be a factor, it's going to be almost impossible to preserve these black districts."

McKinney and her colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) also denounced the court's ruling in the strongest terms. "It's a setback for democracy," said McKinney, 40, the first black woman Georgia ever sent to Congress. "The issue of fairness has been squarely left behind," she said. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) charged: "They are trying to bring the United States Congress back to the old white boys' club that it used to be. They say you should not take color into consideration. They don't say, 'Don't take into consideration lack of color.'"

Some critics charge that black leaders are promoting racial paranoia by overstating their case. African-Americans, they suggest, should abandon doomed strategies of racial preferences and simply get with the "race-neutral" programs pushed by the ascendant GOP.

But an examination of the past suggests that Henderson's fears are well founded. The series of high court rulings that seem so hostile to black interests echoes the backlash that followed Reconstruction, as the federal government abandoned attempts to pursue a policy of racial justice. Following the Civil War, the victorious Union government embarked on a campaign to reconstruct the shattered nation by helping newly freed slaves better assimilate into the mainstream. African-Americans were politically enfranchised for the first time, and several other Reconstruction programs were instituted to help compensate blacks for the horrors and deprivations of slavery.

These efforts were deeply resented by the "Redeemers," who preferred the Southern status quo of white domination. These Southerners were violently opposed to the federal government's intrusion into their system of racial hierarchy. Much like today's "devolutionists," who argue that the primary responsibilities of government should be returned to the states, the Redeemers called for "home rule." Following the compromise selection of Rutherford B. Hayes as president in 1877, the Redeemers presented their own contract with America and executed an explicitly racist program to kill Reconstruction.

Their success was most conspicuous in the realm of electoral politics: From 1870 to 1901, 22 blacks served in Congress, and more than 700 served in Southern state legislatures. By 1902, every single black elected official had vanished. But the Redeemers wrought social and economic changes as well. The right-wing militia of that period, the Ku Klux Klan, aided the "Redemption" with a bloody campaign of racial and political terrorism. Thousands of organizers, business people and politicians were persecuted and, in some cases, murdered by the Klan or other vigilante groups, and African-Americans virtually disappeared from public life in the South.



Georgia Rep. Cynthia McKinney's district has been declared unconstitutional.

Through it all, the Supreme Court issued a series of rulings that rendered the racist status quo inviolable. The court's 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision upheld "separate but equal" racial treatment and provided the legal foundation for the official apartheid of Jim Crow. The civil rights movement may have eclipsed the Jim Crow era socially, but it took the 1964 Civil Rights Act to end it legally. So when five justices in 1995 issue rulings that contest the very logic of that movement, it is a cause for serious concern.

The court's three race-related rulings were decided by 5-4 margins. Predictably, the Supreme Court's quintet of

conservative justices were all appointed by Republican Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Reagan appointed Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia and William Kennedy. Bush appointed Clarence Thomas, the lone black justice and, it turns out, the most conservative of the lot. Thomas' positions on racial issues are especially ironic, given the affirmative-action nature of his appointment to the "black" seat of late Justice Thurgood Marshall. The quartet of dissenters in each case was comprised of Justices Stevens, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, David Souter and Stephen Breyer.

In the redistricting case, *Miller vs. Johnson*, the court ruled that "racial classification with respect to voting threatens to carry us further from the goal of a political system in which race no longer matters." The decision is actually a sequel to a 1993 case involving North Carolina's 12th Congressional District (*Shaw vs. Reno*), in which the court for the first time ruled that crafting a district on the basis of race could be deemed unconstitutional. Despite the fact that North Carolina—with a black population of 22 percent—had not sent an African-American to Congress since the turn of the century, the court ruled that race-conscious efforts to aid blacks should be subjected to the same standards as racist measures against them.

Writing the opinion for the 1993 ruling, Justice O'Connor argued that "racial gerrymandering, even for remedial purposes, may balkanize us into competing racial factions." Her argument, warning of "political apartheid," hinted that the Voting Rights Act itself may violate the Constitution, since the legislation clearly stipulates race-conscious remedies for past deprivations. The *Miller vs. Johnson* decision reinforced that argument, but still allows states to take race into account when drawing political districts if the injury of past racial exclusion can be clearly shown.

Justices Thomas and Scalia both wrote opinions that concurred with the ruling but went even further by denying the relevance of race. As Thomas wrote, all government preferences based on race are "racial discrimination, plain and simple." Thomas' opinions are particularly galling to black leaders. "It is especially painful," observed two-time presidential candidate Jesse Jackson, "that a descendant of slaves in effect stabbed Dr. [Martin Luther] King and other civil rights and social justice martyrs in the back."

The court's redistricting rulings were provoked by Congress' 1982 decision to strengthen the 1965 Voting Rights Act. By the early '80s it had become clear that the Voting Rights Act had fallen short of its goal: White majorities throughout the country were still effectively freezing blacks out of elected office. For example, African-Americans comprise at least 20 per cent of the populations of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and North and South Carolina, yet from the end of Reconstruction until 1986 none of those states had elected a

black congressional representative. To finally redress this inequality, Congress used the new law to require political mapmakers to design districts that ensure minority dominance. Following the 1990 census, 16 congressional districts were redrawn to ensure black representation, boosting membership in the Congressional Black Caucus from 23 in 1990 to 40 today, with most of the new members coming from Southern constituencies.

At the same time, however, consolidating black voters in districts has tended to concentrate the Democratic vote, leaving neighboring districts correspondingly more Republican. Some analysts argue that this effect contributed to the loss of some traditionally Democratic seats in the South in the elections of 1992 and 1994 and narrowed the vote margins of some Democrats who were re-elected.

Some black leaders are using the opportunity provided by the court rulings to entertain alternative means to ensure fair African-American representation. McKinney, for example, is working on a bill that aims for proportional representation using cumulative voting, a system that gained wide notice through the writings of Lani Guinier, Clinton's ill-fated candidate for assistant attorney general for civil rights.

The cumulative voting plan—which is in effect in Alamogordo, N.M., Peoria, Ill., and Chilton County, Ala.—allows voters to cast several ballots for a single elective office. In Chilton County it works like this: When the county undertook a cumulative voting plan for a seven-seat county commission, voters were given seven votes and told they could distribute them in any way they chose. When ballots were printed, there were seven blank spaces next to the name of each of 14 candidates.

Even though African-Americans comprised just 11 percent of Chilton County's voters, they were allowed to cast a maximum of seven votes for the lone black candidate. When the final votes were tallied, whites won six seats, but the black candidate captured one, becoming the first black commissioner ever elected in Chilton.

"Rep. McKinney first started talking about proportional representation when it became clear that the Supreme Court would rule against her district," says Rob Richie, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Voting and Democracy. "But although she was motivated by an interest in salvaging her seat, she has since become quite an advocate of the concept."

Cumulative voting is the most common form of proportional representation, Richie explains, but there are other methods as well. "There is preference voting, in which voters rank candidates in favor of preference. And there is limited voting, where election officials limit the number of candidates a party can nominate." Richie says preference voting seems to be the best system for the long term. "It's the wave of the future," he predicts.

With the top court turning its back on American history, the future may be the best place to look for racial justice. ◀



## DIALOGUE

# Antisocial Security

By Doug Henwood

I was shocked to read an editorial in this magazine ("Social Insecurity," June 12) arguing that the government should invest surplus Social Security funds "in the private sector through high-grade bond or stock index funds"—rather than in U.S. Treasury bonds as they are now. I'm used to reading that sort of thing in the business press and World Bank publications, but in *In These Times*?

To start with, the editorial proceeds from the universally accepted but rarely examined assumption that the Social Security trust fund is doomed to go bust sometime in the next couple of decades. Such dire predictions are derived from the trustees of the Social Security system, who publish such projections in their annual reports. But anyone bothering to read the reports will discover that the projections assume the economy will grow by just 1.5 percent a year for the next 75 years—half the growth rate of the previous 75, and even below the 1.9 percent growth rate of the 1930s. An alternative scenario provided by the trustees, based on a more normal 2.2 percent rate, shows that the system remains solvent indefinitely. At 2.5 percent—still below the previous 75-year average—the trust fund runs a respectable surplus. (For more on these scenarios, see my article in *Left Business Observer*, #67.)

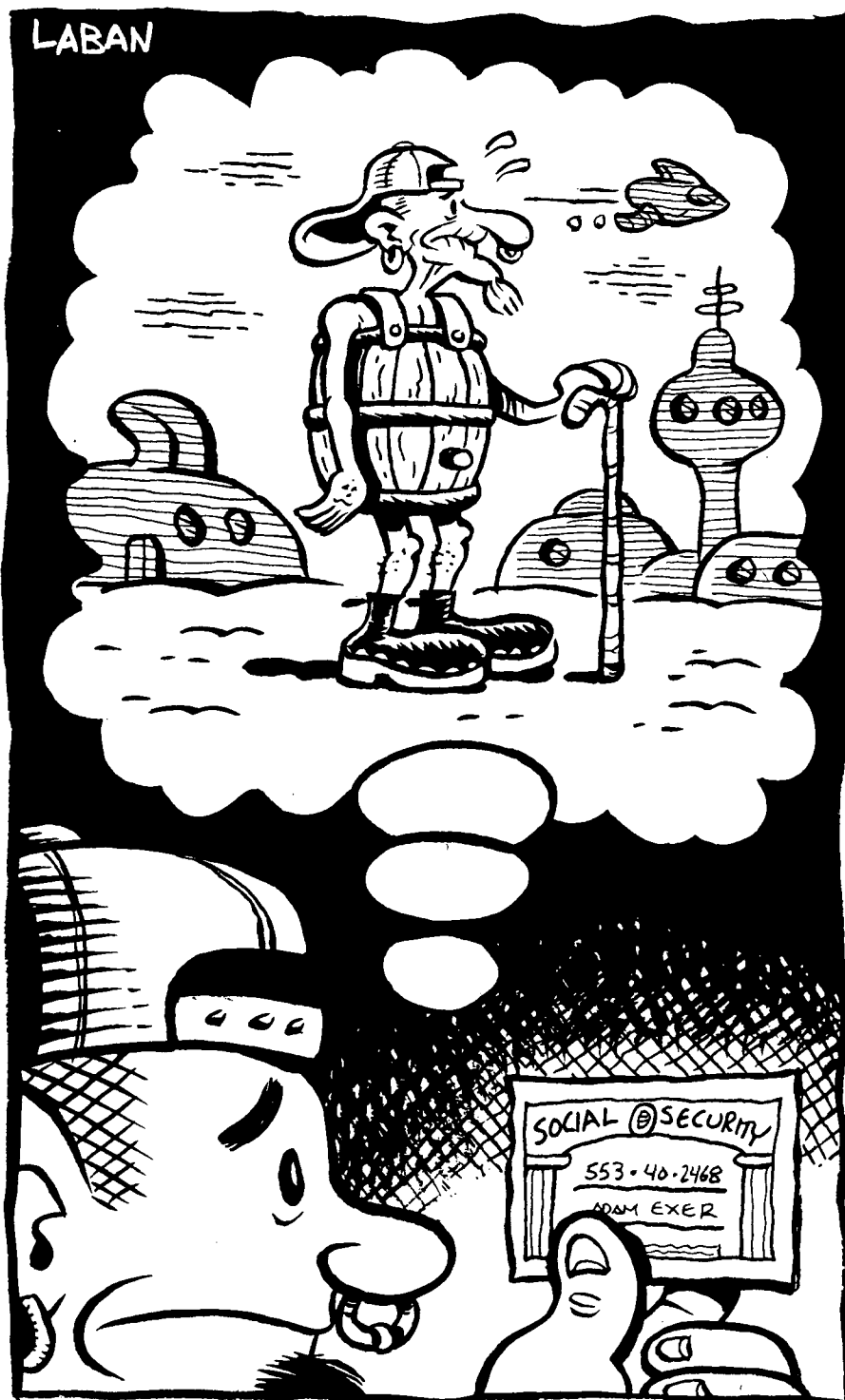
But that's only the beginning of the editorial's problems. In crafting an investment scheme that will "appeal to the

champions of privatization," *ITT's* editorialist, James Weinstein, accepts a whole slew of the privatizers' mistaken assumptions. Weinstein blithely assumes that the entire Social Security surplus could be poured safely into the nation's financial markets. In fact, the government would have considerable difficulty finding enough "high-grade" stocks and bonds to purchase. Currently, the Social Security trust fund is running an annual surplus of more than \$50 billion, and that surplus is expected to reach \$83 billion by the year 2000. Let's put those numbers in perspective by comparing them to the amount of money that private firms raise in the financial markets. Over the last five years, U.S. non-financial corporations issued an average of \$58 billion in new bonds; in 1994, they issued \$22 billion. At the same time, they bought more stock—either their own shares, to boost the price, or the shares of other companies they were taking over—than they usually issued. So, the Social Security trust fund would have been in a position to buy every new bond issued by U.S. corporations and still have had plenty of money left over.

Financial corporations do issue more stocks and bonds than non-financial ones, but they're a special case, and not relevant to Weinstein's aim of having the interest paid to the Social Security fund amount to "a progressive tax on business." Most of the paper issued by financial firms comes from the issuers of asset-backed securities, who repackage credit card and mortgage debts for sale to big institutional investors. Since much of the money they raise is simply lent again—to car and house buyers, for example—such businesses would probably pay their "tax" by jacking up the interest rate charged to consumers, hardly a "progressive" arrangement. Consequently, any attempt to use this scheme as a covert tax would have to focus on non-financial firms, leaving a much smaller pool of investments to target.

The point of this elaborate argument is to show that the trust fund would quickly become a massive presence in the financial markets, the largest single source of funds for Wall Street. That might be fine were there a political strategy behind the shift—like the socialization of corporate America—but the editorial never made that argument. There was a brief mention of Sweden, which I assume is a

*Should  
the Social  
Security  
trust fund  
be invested  
on Wall  
Street?*



wage cuts and downsizing to real investment? And who would choose which bonds to buy? Professional portfolio managers? How would the trust fund handle the inevitable bankruptcies of the firms whose bonds it bought? If the socialization of finance capital came to a bad end in Sweden, a country with a long and serious left-wing tradition, how will it ever work in America, a country of scams, reaction and falling wages? As things stand now, pushing Social Security funds into the financial markets would be nothing more than than a windfall for Wall Street.

It is a dangerous delusion to assume, as Weinstein does, that "high-grade" securities—as opposed to junk bonds—will provide a safe haven for Social Security's excess revenues. Injecting scores of billions in Social Security surpluses into the stock market might send the Dow to 20,000 today, but what happens in the future when it's time to draw down the funds? Are we to hope that the stock market will grow, Ponzi-like, ever-faster than the economy?

Unlike individuals, a society as a whole cannot set aside savings and draw on them in the future. Rather, it must fund productive investment today that will expand the real wealth of the society tomorrow. Keynes nicely summarized this point in *The General Theory*: "We cannot, as a community, provide for future consumption by financial expedients but only [by] current physical output." Given Wall Street's addiction to suspect financial instruments, it is simply foolish to believe that investments in stocks and bonds will provide more money 20 or 30 years hence than tax revenues.

The best way to make Social Security truly secure is to make the investments in housing, transportation and infrastructure that Keynes was talking about. And we should add to that by

reference to that country's now-quashed wage-earner funds, which were a conscious attempt to socialize the corporate sector. Swedish capital screamed, correctly perceiving a death threat, and the wage-earner funds were killed.

Stocks and bonds aren't just pieces of paper; they're real instruments of control. How would the government's shares be voted? With management? In accordance with usual Wall Street practice, which now prefers layoffs,

making social investments in education, child care and environmental reconstruction that will assure a civilized and prosperous future.

At a time when the public sector's prestige is low and under constant attack, I don't see the point of proposing a private market solution to a problem that doesn't really exist. Just as *In These Times* has repeatedly touted the merits of a single-payer health care system—noting that

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the administrative costs of private medical insurance are much higher than public insurance—it should be defending the advantages of our public pension system. While most private pension plans are inefficient and skewed toward the overprivileged, Social Security works very well and is extraordinarily popular. Social Security's administrative costs are about 0.5 percent of its total expenditures. Throw in private portfolio managers and stockbrokers and you're talking many times that.

I'd hoped that when the word "socialism" disappeared from *ITT*'s masthead in 1992 that the editors had simply made a marketing decision. If I see many more editorials like "Social Insecurity," I'll have to conclude that things are worse than I feared.

**Doug Henwood** is editor of the *Left Business Observer*, and a contributing editor of *The Nation*. His book, *Wall Street*, will be published by Verso this winter.

## Seize the time, save the fund

By James Weinstein

**T**he issue here is not who is the true socialist, but how to protect Social Security (including Medicare) from the attacks on it by Republicans and conservative Democrats. Every day we read in the press or hear on radio or TV about the difficulty of keeping "middle-class entitlements like Social Security." In fact, Social Security is an insurance fund that is entirely self-financing. Indeed, as we have frequently pointed out, and as Henwood reminds us, the Social Security fund has been taking in a great deal more than it has been paying out for many years. And Henwood may well be correct in asserting that it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, despite the near-universal predictions that the annual surplus will diminish to zero early in the next century and that payments will then have to be made from the accumulated surplus of years past. That's the political reality in which the current debate is taking place.

As we have noted from time to time, Social Security funds were supposed to be segregated from general revenues, but are now being mixed with them in order to disguise the true measure of the deficit. (In addition, the interest on the special Social Security bonds is not being paid but constitutes an accumulating IOU owed to the fund by the government.)

When President Reagan cut income taxes in the '80s, he also steeply increased Social Security taxes. This created the surplus and helped hide the extent of annual deficits

caused by his military spending. This sleight of hand put the burden of increased taxes on working people, since Social Security taxes are paid only on earned income, and in 1995 only the first \$61,200 of that. And, of course, the interest on this surplus in the Social Security fund will also be paid by taxes, if it is ever paid at all.

Given the political situation today, the only possible way to remove Social Security from attacks by leaders of both parties is to re-establish and strengthen the wall between Social Security financing and general government income and spending. That would require investment of Social Security funds primarily in the private market.

Yes, there are dangers there, but it seems to me that they are less than the dangers now facing the fund. (Henwood does not address this question, and his objections are accompanied by an implicit acknowledgment that should the fund be invested privately it would open the possibility of some political direction of corporate and financial policy.) That, of course, should also lead to greater public interest and participation in public policy debates, given that the public's money and future income would be at issue. And that's all to the good.

Finally, my suggestion responds to the widespread concern among young workers that by the time they reach 65 Social Security will be bankrupt. The point is to protect Social Security and to prevent the fund's use as a cover for increased military spending. If this is not truly socialist, at least not to a true believer of the old school, so be it. ▲

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## VIEWPOINT

# Labor's stake in welfare reform

By Ellen Bravo and Ken Grossinger

**A**fter the GOP's sweep in the November elections, the National Restaurant Association vowed that it would press for welfare reform in the 104th Congress. It may seem odd that the association would care about welfare reform. But America's restaurants, which are always seeking a steady supply of cheap labor, understand something that the U.S. labor movement needs to grasp: The welfare reform legislation now before Congress, though clearly aimed at the non-working poor, would also have an enormous impact on working families.

Republican-backed bills in both the House and the Senate would drive down the wages of the lowest paid workers, displace current workers with welfare recipients, and

*Why organized labor needs to close ranks to battle the GOP's welfare reforms.*

make it even more difficult for unions to negotiate decent contracts. The Republican reforms would do this by forcing welfare recipients off public aid and into the nation's labor market—creating a huge pool of low-wage workers. In addition, the reforms—by creating “workfare” programs that allow employers to fill regular jobs with welfare recipients—would convert permanent jobs into workfare slots. Unless hundreds of thousands of new jobs are created, the market will be flooded with workers seeking jobs that don't exist.

Right now businesses in many cities face market pressure to increase the minimum wage. The combination of low pay and no benefits makes it difficult for many adult

workers to support a family on \$4.25 an hour. At a time when the administration is calling for a modest hike in the minimum wage, the GOP's welfare reform offers a more appealing solution to the business community. Rather than worry about lifting the lowest wage rates, employers can rely on the welfare reform to keep pay down all along the scale. And any measure that lowers the wage floor makes it more difficult for organized labor to negotiate pay increases. It also allows non-union employers to offer jobs at even lower rates. While driving down the wages of those on the bottom, welfare reform would lower the living standard of middle-income workers as well.

GOP sponsors of the Personal Responsibility Act (PRA)—a key component of the Contract with America that passed the House on March 24—estimate that 1.5 million welfare

recipients would enter the job market in the first two years after their bill became law. And, according to sketchy details released by Republicans, the PRA's workfare programs would allow employers to hire welfare recipients whose wages would be paid by the government—effectively giving companies access to a free labor market.

And we don't have to wait for the PRA to become law to know what effect GOP-style “reform” would have on organized labor. For years, public employee unions have seen formerly unionized positions filled by workfare participants—many of whom work off their welfare benefits at sub-minimum-wage rates. In San Francisco, for instance, Service Employees International (SEIU) Local 790 learned during contract negotiations that a worker in the Department of Public Works who had lost his job as a result of city budget cuts was placed into his old position through the city's workfare program—and was earning significantly less. At San Francisco General Hospital, Local 790 found that vacant laundry positions—which had been unionized—were being filled with workfare participants. The union eventually negotiated new contract language to prevent further erosion of its bargaining unit, but public employees in other cities still face the same threat. Even more jobs are at stake in the private, low-wage service sector.

With Republicans and some conservative Democrats launching their assault on public assistance, it is time for unions to step up their defense of health and welfare programs. Today's unemployment benefits and social programs, although meager, don't just help the non-working poor; they also give workers a chance to stand up to employers. When workers know they qualify for public relief, they cannot be as easily coerced into minimum-wage jobs with no benefits. Unions can bargain stronger wage

and benefit packages when their members know they have a safety net of health and welfare protections to fall back on during an organizing drive, negotiation or strike.

The current welfare system guarantees a modicum of economic support for poor families with children, but both the PRA and a similar measure approved by the Senate Finance Committee in late May would eliminate that guarantee. Currently, when the number of poor people rises, as in a recession, the federal government must increase welfare funding to cover everyone who is entitled to assistance. But the PRA would replace today's entitlement programs with federal block grants, lump sums of money that states could spend with little federal oversight. Some 300 welfare programs would be affected, including school lunch programs, disability relief and the nation's main welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Under the GOP's block-grant proposal, the federal government would provide states with fixed funding for public assistance—and even if the number of poor increased, federal spending would not.

By turning entitlement programs such as AFDC into block grants, the PRA would cut nearly \$70 billion in social welfare spending over the next five years. Recent studies by SEIU and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities demonstrate how this "block and cut" strategy would result in a massive loss of federal funding to the states. This loss would likely lead to reduced services, slashed benefits and increased unemployment. To offset this revenue reduction, states intent on maintaining services would be forced to raise taxes.

The 104th Congress' efforts to undermine both social programs and labor standards are unprecedented in recent history. Like most organizations, unions are still developing a national response to the current crisis. How can labor reframe the debate over welfare? For starters, organized labor should take a clear stand on the issues and undertake broad education among its ranks. Union members need to understand the impact that the PRA could have on their lives.

Organized labor must press President Clinton to veto any bill that would replace workers with welfare recipients. As recently retired AFL-CIO Legislative Director Robert McGlotten noted in a letter to Congress: "Real and gainful employment must be the goal of welfare reform. If we take the existing jobs of one set of workers and turn them into subsidized, temporary work assignments for those receiving welfare benefits, we will simply be creating another large group of potential welfare recipients. That is a self-defeating formula." Unions should fight to include provisions in any welfare reform bill—and in their contracts with employers—that prohibit companies from displacing current workers, or from filling vacant positions, with workfare participants.

Labor also needs to expose the big lie of welfare recipients as lazy women unwilling to get jobs. In fact, 70 percent

of AFDC recipients either hold jobs or are looking for them. Many are pushed out of the workforce by low pay, lack of flexibility and unaffordable health or child care. Surveys suggest that the public has been influenced by negative stereotypes about welfare, yet most Americans still support expanding assistance to the poor. When a recent *New York Times*/CBS News Poll asked people whether the nation spends enough on "welfare," only 23 percent said that we spend too little. However, when the question was rephrased—with "welfare" replaced by the term "assistance to the poor"—64 percent responded that we spend too little.

Unions should expose politicians who hand out subsidies to big business while punishing the poor. This year, AFDC will cost the federal government \$17 billion—little more than 1 percent of the total federal budget. By comparison, Ralph Nader's Essential Information project found at least \$167 billion in corporate welfare in the 1995 federal budget.

By fighting corporate welfare, holding the line on the social and health programs we value, and pushing for expansion of family-supporting jobs and benefits, labor can safeguard employed and unemployed workers alike. Ultimately, welfare recipients want what we all want: a way to support themselves and their families with dignity. ◀

Ellen Bravo is executive director of 9to5, National Association of Working Women. Ken Grossinger is legislative field coordinator of the Service Employees International Union.

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# I N T H E A R T S

## Girl meets girl

**M**ore gay-themed movies have come out in the last two years, it seems, than in the preceding two decades. From the Oscar-winning *Philadelphia*, to the coy Hollywood sex triangle *Three of Hearts*, to imports such as the Anglo-Irish drama *A Man of No Importance* and the Australian father-son comedy *The Sum of Us*, gay movies and gay characters have become something of a cottage industry.

*Two new  
gay-themed  
movies have  
"crossover"  
written all  
over them.*

By Pat Dowell

The box-office success of *The Crying Game* in 1992 and *Philadelphia* in 1993 has something to do with it, of course, but even smaller successes have had their impact. Last year *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* became an arthouse hit, earning \$10 million. Drag comedy, always infused with a heavy dose of pathos, has been one of the few gay-related themes that

the film industry has found consistently profitable, since *Outrageous!* in 1977 and *La Cage Aux Folles* in 1978. That French chestnut, which has already been recycled on Broadway, is headed for Hollywood, where Robin Williams and Nathan Lane will play the lead roles. And there's a movie, *To Wong Fu, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*, due out in September, which, like *Priscilla*, features three drag queens—played by Patrick Swayze, Wesley Snipes and John Leguizamo—on a cross-country odyssey.

This upsurge in gay-related Hollywood filmmaking is certainly significant, but it is the off-Hollywood independent directors who have always seemed determined to explore gay issues and lives without pandering to the fears of straight audiences. Some, like Gregg Araki, who made the 1992 AIDS outlaw love story *The Living End* and last year's *Totally Fucked Up*, and Todd Haynes, who directed *Superstar* (1987) and *Poison* (1990), don't seem terribly concerned with making gays acceptable. But that's clearly the issue that dominates the business of film,

where the search for a "crossover" hit has turned up some new shoestring independents that seem set on swimming into the mainstream.

Indeed, "crossover" was almost the first word applied to *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*. Even the *New York Times* anointed Maria Maggenti's bright little romantic comedy a crossover success—meaning, presumably, that it's the gay movie for people who aren't, or as these things are usually put, that it's a love story about a couple who just happen to be.

And indeed, the two girls of the title have plenty of charm. They are New Jersey high school seniors who have seldom crossed paths. Randy (Laurel Holloman) dresses grunge, struggles at her studies and endures the snottiness of her classmates, who think she's "a total diesel dyke." Randy lives with her aunt and her aunt's girlfriend in what she calls "your typical all-American lesbo household" and works in her aunt's garage. That's how she meets Evie (Nicole Parker), the Buppie success story at school. Elegant, brainy, popular and affluent, Evie drives a Range Rover and stops at the garage one day, where Randy pumps air in her tires. Evie's not gay—at least she's not inclined to be, until Randy's boyish sensuality and genuine friendliness get past the barriers of adolescence and sexual preference. Soon the two of them are giving teenage sleep-overs a new dimension.

Writer-director Maria Maggenti plays their story for its tenderness and humor, charting the highs and lows of courtship among the impossibly young, poking a little affectionate fun at their sense that the world ends at their fingertips. Its tone is not unlike *Love Finds Andy Hardy*—or, for those with younger movie memories, *Before Sunrise*. No



© Alyce Levy/Fine Line



**The Incredibly  
True Adventures of  
Two Girls in Love**  
Directed by  
Maria Maggenti

guilt trips, no suicides, no wretchedness here, not even when Evie experiences the sad little desertion of her "best friends."

The scene shows at once Maggenti's lightness of touch and the movie's limited emotional palette. It is played in a diner, with the three airheads lined up across the table from Evie in their favorite booth. Their erstwhile idol explains that she's in love with a girl—and so what? They express just how yucky they think that sounds—and one of them keeps asking whether she has to keep this yummy secret to herself.

When this trio finally gets up to go, the loss seems hardly worth noticing. Evie sheds a few tears, of course, but the friends haven't really left the story. They show up at the screwball-comedy ending, in which the two lovers have holed up in a cheap motel after a few setbacks (failing math, being caught in bed by Evie's straight mom and messing up her kitchen). All the movie's supporting cast descends on their hideaway—a fuming, worried and ultimately compassionate audience to Randy and Evie's true coming out (of their motel room and of their teenage closets).

responses of Hollywood fare.

There's a similar plea for acceptance underlying *Bar Girls*, Marita Giovanni's romantic comedy set around a lesbian bar in Los Angeles, where two women (Loretta Allison Wolfe and Liza D'Agostino) meet and fall in love. Their problems—commitment, fidelity, jealousy—are dramatized with familiar movie ups and downs. The *only* thing that distinguishes *Bar Girls* from a thousand other romantic comedies is the fact that all the sexual partners and rivals are women. It is a far more polished movie than the similarly themed *Go Fish*, which was released earlier this year, and it has characters who build into three-dimensional people. But the movie ends up just as boringly predictable as any sentimental tale of love starring, oh, Marisa Tomei—right down to the main character's touchy-feely epiphany that "You have to love yourself before anyone else can love you."

*Bar Girls* and *Two Girls* are, at their best, appealingly light-hearted and, at their worst, only too earnest. If either one succeeds commercially, it may well enlarge the market for more big-screen gay characters and stories—to be made by writers and directors who will not, I hope, be inspired only to cross over into that great American mainstream of amiable mediocrity, where playing it safe is the hallmark of success. ▴

# I N P R I N T

## Power tool

By Scott McLemee

Let the record show that David Halperin is an enthusiast for Michel Foucault. "As far as I'm concerned," he writes, "the guy was a fucking saint." Nor should that last turn of phrase be construed as mere vulgarity or just an allusion to Sartre's *Saint Genet*. It carries great political significance. For the purpose of *Saint Foucault* is to establish the French social theorist as the patron saint of gay studies—martyred, as it were, by AIDS, which killed Foucault in 1984, a few days after the second and third volumes of his monumental, unfinished *History of Sexuality* were published.

The reader not already familiar with Foucault's work will be at a hopeless disadvantage before this "gay hagiography." Even someone who has read *The History of Sexuality* may find Halperin's book bewildering. Remember: Foucault wasn't a thinker, but a saint. He produced not books and ideas (to be argued about, like those of any other intellectual) but, rather, *miracles*. They must be gazed upon in rapt awe. They cannot be questioned or criticized. To do so is proof that one is the merest infidel, to be plunged forever into the outer darkness.

But what the hell. Let's have a skeptical look anyway.

For a broad overview of Foucault's work, we might carve it into two segments: (1) *The History of Sexuality* and (2) everything else. This, to be sure, is a very rough way of handling the man's thought—enough so to make any Foucault scholar shudder. Then again, Halperin himself ignores everything but the *History*. And he defiantly calls *Saint Foucault* "crude, reductive, overly general, abstracted from its contexts, and singularly lacking in the subtlety which Foucault himself never ceased to display." So why should a mere reviewer be held to a higher standard?

In his early books, Foucault explored the intimate links between truth and repression in the West from roughly the 17th century onward. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *Discipline and Punish*

(1975) he studied how specific institutions and bodies of knowledge emerged to examine and control "the abnormal." For Foucault, the institutions he studied—the asylum, the hospital, the prison—were the sites in which modern society tried to exorcise deviance and establish the reasonableness of its own order.

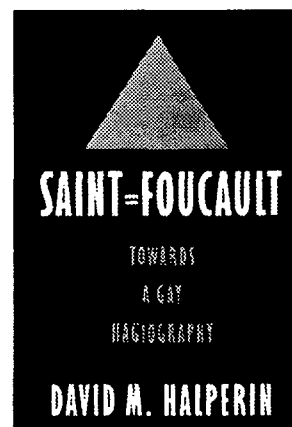
Within the space of these institutions, deviance was scrutinized. Madness, disease, transgression—these were to yield their secrets to the discourses of psychology, medicine and penology. Power and knowledge were two sides of a coin; and they were both, in a sense, inseparable from repression.

Much the same perspective informed the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* when it appeared in 1976. Yet Foucault's analysis there stood on its head the conception most people have about the history of sex and "repression." Focusing primarily on the 19th century, Foucault challenged the notion that discourse on sex had been repressed before Freud's upsetting discoveries. Victorian society had certainly been prudish; there was no arguing that point. But Foucault also discerned an overwhelming drive to classify and describe every species of sexual behavior. Among the discourses of medicine, law and education, "sexuality" took shape as a new object of study.

Here Foucault's work turned paradoxical. The more people feel liberated from sexual prohibitions, the more deeply they fall under the control of "sexuality" itself. "We convince ourselves," he wrote, "that we have never said enough on the subject, that, through inertia or submissiveness, we conceal ourselves from the blinding evidence. ... It is possible that where sex is concerned, the most long-winded, the most impatient of societies is our own." (All this, mind you, before daytime television talk shows had revealed their full potential.)

The author intended to write a whole series of case studies in the modern discourse on sexuality. But by the late 1970s (as Foucault admitted to friends) the whole project bored him. For a while, he seemed adrift. And when the second and third volumes appeared in 1984, it was clear that the whole axis of Foucault's thinking had shifted.

His earlier work seemed preoccupied with institutions and power. And he had always focused on the modern and early modern eras. With these two books, though, Foucault's thought entered a time-warp. He went back to Greek and Roman antiquity to study various manuals of self-cultivation. In them, sexual desire was treated as one factor among others that a ruling-



**Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography**  
By David M. Halperin  
Oxford University Press  
246 pp., \$23



class man had to understand and control to make himself over into a truly noble person.

A fourth volume was to study the rules of the confessional in medieval Christianity. It was all but finished when Foucault was diagnosed with a brain lesion. He was perhaps the first internationally known figure to succumb to what was then being called "the gay cancer," AIDS—though it would be some while before his public realized this. His condition soon deteriorated. Foucault died in June 1984, at the grievously early age of 59.

During his lifetime, some of his American readers knew Foucault was gay. Most of us didn't. In recent years there have been no less than three full-length biographies. One of them, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, by James Miller, revealed a good deal about the philosopher's more specialized erotic interest: sadomasochism. Foucault himself

was neither in the closet about his sexual preferences nor eager to claim any particular sexual "identity."

Indeed (as per the first volume of the *History*), Foucault considered the very urge to find one's "identity" through sex to be, at best, a troubled proposition. What would he have made of *Saint Foucault*? An irreverent soul if ever there was one, Foucault would have raised severe questions about "gay and lesbian studies" or "queer theory" as disciplines. Such matters scarcely trouble Halperin—who is, according to the dust jacket, "a founding editor of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* ... a co-editor of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* ... [and] the author most notably of *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, which *Outweek* called 'the single most important contribution to the interpretation of gay history in nearly a decade.'"

The quickest way for an academic radical to claim unquestionable legitimacy for his or her project is to link it directly to activism. Halperin wastes no time doing so. The book's cover design mimics the "Silence=Death" logo. And the author asks, "What book do we imagine the more reflective members of ACT UP to carry around with them in their leather jackets?"

The answer, it seems, is volume one of the *History*. (Of course, owning that book doesn't make someone a Foucauldian, any more than getting a tattoo makes someone a Maori warrior; but never mind.) And at least in connection with AIDS activism, the significance of Foucault's work is fairly clear. It challenges the whole regime of medical expertise and knowledge—according to which doctors have power because they possess knowledge, while patients are supposed to be, in a word, patient. ACT UP has disrupted that power-knowledge hierarchy in numerous ways, with effects that have been all to the good.

A fascinating book might be written about the implications of ACT UP for Foucault's theories, and vice versa. But *Saint Foucault* is not that book. It consists, rather, of two longish essays that argue for Foucault's status as the definitive thinker in the field of gay and lesbian studies. Foucault himself might disagree; but too bad for Foucault. Too bad, also, for anyone *outside* the field who dares to write about Foucault and sexuality—for Halperin mobilizes against them the heaviest





guns of jargon and sarcasm he can muster. And these are considerable.

Foucault's biographers get the worst of it—especially James Miller, whose book is apparently unforgivable. For one thing, Miller is a straight person. No straight person can be allowed to wonder about the possible connection between Foucault's sadomasochism and the themes of violence, power and death that run throughout his works. That's homophobic. Furthermore, in analyzing Foucault's books, "Miller treats [them] as a series of encrypted autobiographies," Halperin bitterly complains. Of course, Foucault himself once told an interviewer that he wrote them "as a direct experience to 'tear' me from myself, to prevent me from always being the same." But again, who asked Foucault?

About half of *Saint Foucault* buzzes waspishly around Miller's biography, finding it suffused with the most violently antigay intentions. Indeed, the very fact that Miller announces that he is trying sympathetically to understand Foucault's fascination with sadomasochism—this is, for Halperin, the most damning of all. For *Saint Foucault*'s basic lesson is that any such left-liberal efforts at understanding are fatally tinged with homophobia. Gay culture, in Halperin's view, is wholly separate from (and presumably incomprehensible to) the heterosexual world.

In making these claims, Halperin pursues a logic that can only be called totalitarian. Every single thing a gay person does is political. Of course, getting arrested at an ACT UP demonstration is resistance to heterosexual power. But so, apparently, is going to the gym—and not simply because working out can be good for an enervated immune system. As Halperin insists, "Queer muscles are not the same as straight muscles." The difference between a gym dandy and a construction worker is that gay guys have "exaggerated, arcane, highly defined, elaborately sculpted muscles," which "derive from no useful pursuit and serve no practical function...." They are, in other words, designed to be sexually attractive—a concern that, it seems, never motivates heterosexual men who work out.

To read this sort of thing while keeping (you should pardon the expression) a straight face: That requires a deep faith in the revealed truths of *The History of Sexuality*, volumes 2 and 3. In that case, I suppose, Halperin's syntactically gnarled interpretation of Foucault's work is probably unnecessary. For anyone else, *Saint Foucault* may seem the *reductio ad absurdum* of lifestyle politics. But woe to anyone who doubts either the politics of being pumped-up or the appeal to Foucault as final arbiter of radical politics. For such questions are, more or less by definition, homophobic, at least on Halperin's watch.

Power, for Foucault, is omnipresent. It forms a circle whose center is everywhere, its circumference nowhere—which was Pascal's definition of God. And all forms of resistance to power are, on this view, simply other

manifestations of it. So how can we recognize one regime or species of power as "legitimate" and another as nightmare-like? Foucault had no answer to that. Indeed, his whole system of thought tends to short-circuit the question itself: All standards of legitimation are themselves functions of some relationship of power.

This outlook, whatever else it may be, is at least consistent. But it raises all sorts of troubling problems for the tender-minded sort who imagine that somehow, somewhere, there must be standards of justice that aren't just alibis for oppression.

David Halperin has no time for such people. Anyone who insists on bringing up issues of justice in the future is almost certainly a homophobe. You have been warned. All criticisms of Foucault from leftist thinkers such as Edward Said and Jürgen Habermas "have been scrupulously examined and persuasively refuted" by several of Halperin's colleagues. (I try to keep up with this stuff, but must admit I've never heard of them.)

But the real target of Halperin's criticism is what he calls, witheringly, "the liberal concept of freedom" as a basis for gay activism. There must be an end to any politics based on the notion that gays and lesbians have certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—rights that are now denied, a situation that (some) non-homosexual people might agree is intolerable.

What does this leave? To judge from *Saint Foucault*, three distinct forms of activity meet Halperin's standard. One is AIDS activism. (How much longer that will be acceptable is hard to say, what with non-gay women and people of color being infected by the disease.) The second is the cultural micro-politics of "queer space"—that is, going to the gym, living in a gay neighborhood and so on. And, third, there is the academic field of gay and lesbian studies, which Halperin has made his own power base.

There is, of course, the pesky phenomenon of well-meaning non-gay-identified folks who show up at the margins of each activity. You can recognize them by the fact that they will mutter things about liberty, equality and solidarity. They may even admire Michel Foucault's work without accepting every jot and tittle.

Pay them no mind. David Halperin will be along shortly with a polemic to drive them away. In the process, he may also become powerful—enough so, at least, to assemble two short (and sometimes barely coherent) essays between covers, and get a major university press to publish them as a book.

But then, power is what it's all about. Power, and faith—which in *Saint Foucault* are inextricably fused. After all, to declare a person a saint is no trivial matter. Not just *anyone* can do it. And so canon law permits only one conclusion. If Michel Foucault is the patron saint of gay studies, then David Halperin must be its pope. Power works in mysterious ways.

Scott McLemee is a contributing editor of *In These Times*. He has prepared several entries for *Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* (Henry Holt and Co.).

# Road warrior

By **Ilan Stavans**

**T**his tiny volume records one of the unlikelier road stories of our age. At the end of 1951, Ernesto Che Guevara, then an unemployed student, was living in Cordoba; his family had moved there from Buenos Aires in the hopes that the drier climate would reduce Che's severe asthma attacks. Among his closest friends was Alberto Granado, an out-of-work biochemist who specialized in the study of leprosy. One afternoon, as they sat drinking maté in Cordoba, they began fantasizing about traveling to far-away places in Asia and sailing tropical seas.

Suddenly, one of them suggested a homelier adventure, of the sort that would soon become the signature of the American Beat generation. They would board La Poderosa

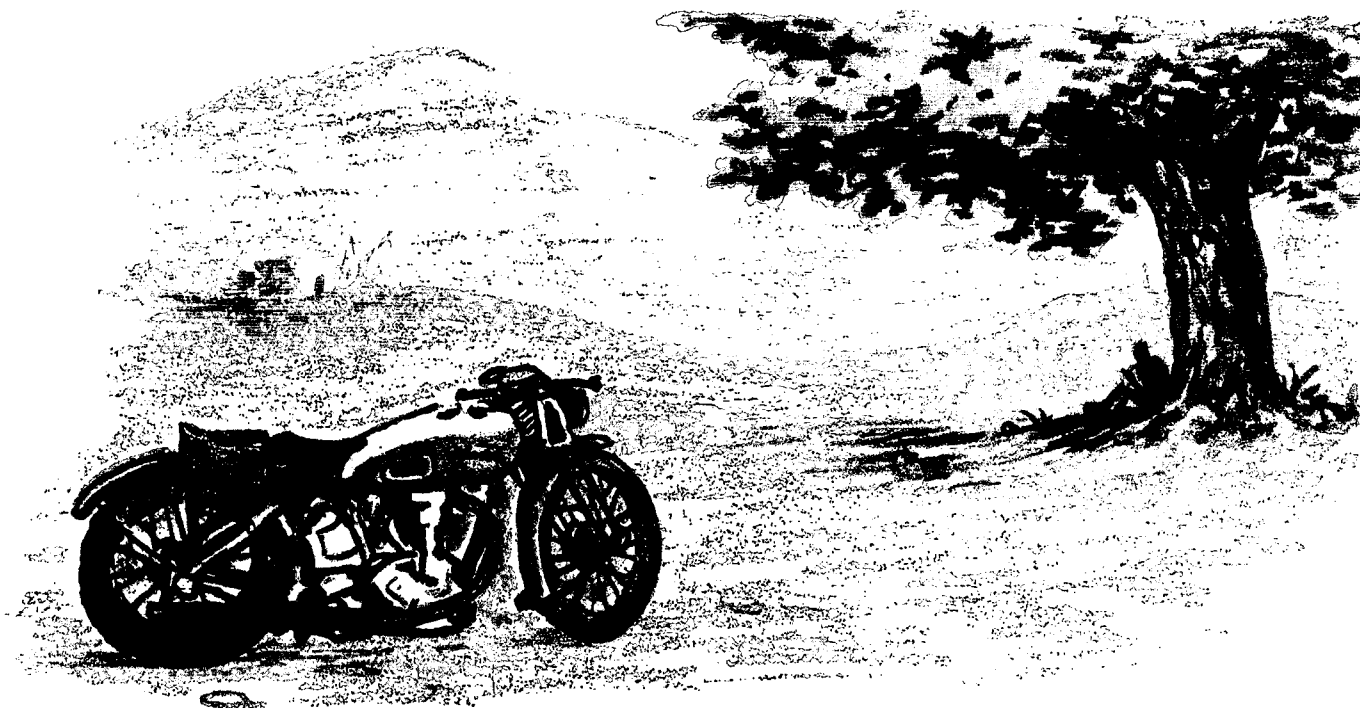
II, an old Norton 500 motorbike, and journey to the United States. As it turned out, they chiefly remained south of the equator—though Che, at the end of their joint travels, made his way up to Miami alone.

Their journey spanned nearly six months (February to July 1952) and five countries (Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela). In Che's travel diaries the two young men meet many of the familiar mishaps and occasions of wonder that make for any spirited road adventure. But unlike the often resolutely apolitical sojourns of the American Beats, this journey also would loom large in the career of the future revolutionary. Together with his friend, he encountered for the first time the full range of South American society—copper miners, union activists, tourists, lepers and priests.

Indeed, not long after his return, Che embarked on another road trip through South America, with a much more pronounced political itinerary, taking him through the Bolivian worker mobilization and agrarian reform movements and the 1954 military coup overthrowing Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz. And in Mexico in 1954, still wandering in search of the soul of the region, Che met Fidel Castro, joining in his fight against Cuba's Batista dictatorship.

What followed, of course, was a history that has been tirelessly mythologized, so that the universal image of Che the revolutionary guerrilla has long superseded many of the details of his actual life. T-shirts, films,

**The Motorcycle Diaries:**  
A Journey Across  
South America  
By Ernesto Che Guevara  
Translated by Ann Wright  
Verso  
155 pp., \$22.95



folk songs and popular books about his life and legendary death are ubiquitous in Latin America and far beyond. The arc of the narrative—long fixed by the bureaucratic apparatus of the Cuban revolution—is familiar: the utopian dreamer who was the conscience of Fidel's revolution; then the tireless freedom fighter who gave up his post as Castro's minister of industry to organize guerrillas in the Bolivian mountains; and finally, the martyr to the stillborn Bolivian revolutionary struggle. And in recent years, rightward revisionist treatments of his life (notably Jay Cantor's *The Death of Che Guevara* and William F. Buckley's novel, *See You Later, Alligator*) have appeared, providing breathless, voyeuristic disclosures showing that the revolutionary saint had feet of clay.

Of course, in reality, the life of Che, like that of most humans, was a much more mixed proposition. His political career and his good works as a physician were laudable; his impulsive and often offensive personality—to say nothing of his womanizing—merited far less admiration.

For this reason alone, the mere existence of *The Motorcycle Diaries* is cause for celebration. Not that it's great writing. Truman Capote, who reportedly greeted Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* by sniffing, "This isn't writing; this is typing," would be unkind still to the raw, exuberant style of Guevara's journals. Of course, Che, unlike Kerouac, did not set out to produce literature. He lurches from abruptly recounted anecdotes to hastily observed descriptions of landscapes and people. He also records the trip's many mundane mishaps: disabling asthma attacks, motorcycle trouble, weather delays.

There is, nevertheless, much that is revealing, both of Che's youthful sensibilities and of his inchoate political awakening. For example, Alberto's brothers commemorate Che and Alberto's plans "with a round of maté [that] sealed our pact not to give up on our dream until it became a reality." And once under way, Che recounts, the trip "never deviated from the general principle laid down then: improvisation." His off-the-cuff cultural observations, meanwhile, reflect his growing embrace of the world beyond his Argentinian upbringing—even when he registers such awareness in the crudely formulated dichotomies characteristic of many '60s Latin American revolutionaries. Upon arriving in Chile, he writes: "The harbour, crammed full of goods we'd never seen before, the market where they sold different foods, the typically Chilean wooden houses, the clothes of the *guasos* [peasants], all felt totally different from what we knew back home; there was something indigenously American, untouched by the exoticism which invaded our pampas. This may be because Anglo-Saxon immigrants in Chile don't mix [with the native population] and so preserve the purity of the indigenous race, which is practically nonexistent in Argentina today."

Che's observations sharpen as the journey unfolds. In the former territory of the Incas, he notes that "the bestial rage of the uncouth conquerors" is everywhere; at Machu Picchu, he observes that American tourists, "hide-bound by their practical view of the world," cannot grasp the full

implication of the Inca struggle for existence.

This British edition of the diaries, capably translated by Ann Wright, stems from an Italian edition released in 1993 by the publishing house Feltrinelli Editore. Until then, the journals had been sequestered in Havana's Che Guevara Latin American Center. In addition, Che's father, Ernesto Guevara Lynch, supplies the prologue and epilogue, adapted from *Mi hijo el Che* (published in Havana in 1988), in which he explains that "Ernesto and his friend were to follow the path of *conquistadores*, except that while the latter thirsted for conquest, these two went with quite a different purpose."

Despite their raw prose style, the diaries sometimes ring with a maturity and ideological sophistication far beyond the intellectual range of a 24-year-old medical student, no matter how precocious. The reason for this is simple. According to Che's second wife, Aleida March de la Torre, the journals "were later rewritten by Ernesto himself as a narrative, offering the reader a deeper insight into Che's life, especially at a little-known stage, and revealing details of his personality, his cultural background and his narrative skills—the genesis of a style which he developed in his later works."

In these revisions, we sometimes see the seeds of later Che mythmaking being sown by Che himself. In what seems an addendum composed back at home in Cordoba, Che tells of an encounter with a shadowy, mysterious man who approaches him out of the darkness in a South American mountain village, rather conveniently revealing to Che the ultimate message of his odyssey: "The future belongs to the people, and gradually or suddenly they will take power, here and all over the world," the figure prophesies. "The problem is that the people need to be educated, and they can't do that before taking power, only after. They can only learn by their own mistakes, and these will be serious and cost many innocent lives. Or maybe not, maybe these lives are not innocent because they belong to those who commit the huge sin *contra natura*; in other words, they lack the ability to adapt. All of them, all those who can't adapt—you and I, for instance—will die cursing the power which they helped bring about with often enormous sacrifices."

Such later interpolations are dismaying, to be sure, but they ultimately do little to undermine the joyous feel of *The Motorcycle Diaries*. The young Che whose spirit dominates the book, is, indeed, strongly suited to times like ours. Despite the later accretions of myth, Che Guevara remains an attractive if doomed figure in the shaping of Latin America's left-wing utopias, not least because he remained true to the instincts of his youth, refusing to tether his dreams to a state bureaucracy and striving to keep his wandering spirit in constant motion. In death, as in life, on top of his Norton 500, his spirit will continue to inspire a passionate, quixotic allegiance. ◀

**Ilan Stavans**, a novelist and critic, teaches at Amherst College. His latest book, *Bandido: Oscar "Zeta" Acosta and the Chicano Experience* (HarperCollins), will be published in September.



# Savage ironies

By Rick Perlstein

Many by now might have forgotten the '90s uproar surrounding the renowned public health pedagogue who urged on America's teachers the tolerance of certain of our boys', ahem, *natural* urges. That would be the 1890s, when G. Stanley Hall, the founder of American professional psychology, suggested to a convention of kindergarten teachers that they should encourage the little ones in their care to fight like wild Africans.

Then, as now, the press was quick to pounce. "To these people we used to send missionaries," thundered one indignant scribe. "And just as we are beginning to congratulate ourselves on reclaiming some men from barbarism, Dr. Hall gets up and advises us to teach our sons to do what we have been endeavoring to teach the savages to avoid." But Hall retorted that *he* was the one defending civilization. "The child is in the primitive stage," he pointed out. "The instinct of the savage survives in him." To repress the youth's passage through the Neanderthal would stunt his natural ascent to civilization's lofty heights and invite the dread disease of the too-hastily refined, *neurasthenia*. On the other hand, since science had proven that the stark difference between the sexes was a trait common only to civilized societies (why else did African men and women both wear dresses?), Hall also made the less controversial claim that the developing girl should be encouraged to be as dainty as she pleased.

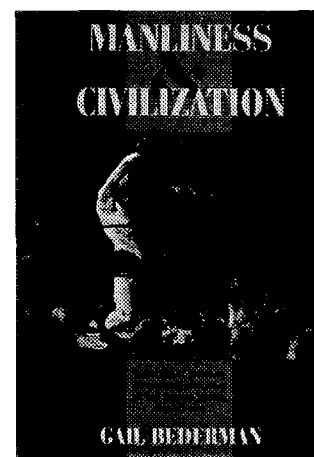
The baroque racial and sexual attitudes that surfaced in the Hall controversy were entirely characteristic of their age, according to historian Gail Bederman. In *Manliness and Civilization*, she argues that turn-of-the-century American culture was obsessed with the rhetoric of "civilization," the key idea that reinforced white supremacy as a man's prerogative to uphold and a woman's to endure—daintily, if you please.

According to Bederman, the intellectual lineaments of that talismanic word, "civilization," underwent radical changes from 1880 to 1917, and understanding these changes is central to understanding white male supremacy yet today. By the Great War, the genteel, restrained manliness that was the hallmark of civilization for an earlier generation of Victorians had all but vanished. In its place emerged the ideal of *masculinity*—the big stick, unsheathed. White men would no longer secure their superiority over the savage world by always acting the opposite of the savage; instead, white men would visit the savage strategically, to recharge the batteries of their virility in order to steel them-

selves for the epic struggle for the survival of the fittest race.

Bederman narrates this cultural transformation by profiling four figures whose lives spanned it: Ida Wells, Hall, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Theodore Roosevelt. If only by adding texture to our emerging genealogy of "the white male" in this moment of his savage apotheosis, the study is all too valuable. Bederman is a gifted historian, possessing an admirably ironic eye and a deft command of the kind of close reading necessary to untangle that knottiest of historical subjects, race in the United States. But viewed against the larger backdrop of Progressive-era thinking on race in particular, the very seamlessness of Bederman's narrative becomes a liability. For it wasn't G. Stanley Hall's vision of white civilization under siege that would carry over most influentially into this century's ideas about race, but the relativist, social-scientific view that civilization was not one, but many—and that none could be deemed innately superior. Indeed, the 20th century downgraded "civilization" to "culture." The kind of harebrained transfer of Darwin's biology into racist ideas about society only surfaces now, like a dialectical bad itch, in the margins of modern American life. This is thanks largely to the labors of pioneering Columbia University anthropologist Franz Boas, perhaps the most influential American scholar of his or any other age—and a figure wholly absent from Bederman's study. But what Bederman allows us to see through this blind spot, despite herself, is how in the 20th century, racism might just grow as ably by perverting Boas as it did Darwin.

To see how this is so, we must follow Bederman's narrative from its beginning in the 1890s anti-lynching campaign led by black reformer Ida Wells. Even as Wells sought to abolish the most racist of crimes, Bederman demonstrates that Wells, a steely pragmatist, framed her crusade in the hoary white supremacist mythology of "civilization." Up to that point, Americans largely believed that lynching was a manly defense of white womanhood against the irredeemably unmanly and unrestrained black savage. Then Wells barnstormed England with accounts of how lynching *really* worked: Lynching was in fact the way eminently *unmanly* Southerners covered up their own unrestrained passion for cross-racial romance. The British press took her point. Englishmen began muttering in print about sending missionaries back to civilize their former



*Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*  
By Gail Bederman  
University of Chicago Press  
307 pp., \$27.50

colonies, and Wells returned to a country convinced that lynching was a national disgrace.

But by 1894, the kind of appeals to civilized restraint that fueled Wells' campaign were all but obsolete. A new, more rough-hewn ideal of maleness was beginning to be celebrated: prizefighting was finding a newfound respectability, and Theodore Roosevelt's first books on the settling of the West were being devoured by an eager public. The psychological writings of Hall, Bederman argues, helped reconcile this new creation with civilization: His signal achievement was to explain how white men could behave like savages without becoming savages themselves. Drawing on the pre-Darwinian theories of the French naturalist Lamarck, Hall maintained that the developmental growth of the individual recapitulated the biological evolution of the species; hence his "boys-will-be-savages" approach to kindergarten discipline. What's more, while savagery was all the inferior races knew, civilization combined the advantages of both civilization *and* anarchy. Blacks, as such an inferior race, remained mired in an arrested state of evolutionary development.

Theodore Roosevelt, Bederman argues, could have been a poster boy for America's wholehearted embrace of this theory. Americans couldn't get enough of his accounts of subduing the rough beasts of the African jungle, and the red beasts of the American frontier, and then retiring to his field tent for a bracing tonic of Shakespeare. Even feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman embraced such Lamarckian doctrines: She merely stood their gender assumptions on their heads. The *least* evolved societies were in fact the ones with the greatest sex differentiation, Gilman argued; she also pleaded for white women to be released from the health-sapping lethargy of the domestic sphere in order to take their place beside men in the struggle for white racial dominance. (Interestingly, both Hall and Gilman were neurasthenics; and, of course, Roosevelt was a sickly child before he became a world conqueror.)

By assembling this quartet to testify to the crucial linkage of race and sex to the ideology of "civilization," Bederman offers a basically sound conclusion: The Progressive era consensus on civilization has survived—and even turns up, largely unmodified, in influential places such as Robert Bly's men's movement, an emblematically modern TR-like effort to have your savagery and eat cake too.

But, as Bederman herself notes, her method comes with severe limitations. "These four figures show some of the different discursive positions it was possible to take in relation to race, manhood and civilization," she writes in her introduction. "I am not suggesting that they are in any way representative, however. Since my methodology focuses specifically on the process of articulation, my main concern is to select a diverse group of people who left a large enough body of sources to reveal their cultural assumptions about race, manhood and civilization. Other equally viable figures could have been chosen, however—for example, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, or Jack London."

This disclaimer, wrought in the earnest and leaden prose

of cultural studies circumspection, betrays shameless bad faith. The subjects Bederman profiles *are* representative figures, and she spends the whole book trying to prove how so. The problem is that they represent a strain of thought about race and gender that was out-"articulated" in the intellectual revolution midwived by Franz Boas.

Drawing on the tradition springing from the 18th-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, Boas spent the years Bederman covers on a slow, steady arc toward the conviction that a single civilization along which different races could be notched did not, in fact, exist at all; rather, he argued for the concept of "cultures," in the plural, each with its own internal complexity and self-sufficient dignity. His celebrated students Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Melville Herskovits and Zora Neale Hurston each did their part to ensure that this would be the view that would be espoused by practically all right-thinking people in the end. About this Bederman has nothing to say.

This objection is far from an academic quibble, for Boas' ghost hovers everywhere in our cultural moment. Every time modern intellectuals decry biological reductionism as a plot to obscure the possibility of social change, they can thank Boas for giving them the tools to make the argument. And every time folks jest about "it" being a (your identity here) "thing," they pay homage to the master, as well.

But I also have a far more unsettling suspicion, one that Bederman's paradigm doesn't allow us to examine at all: That every time Newtistas urge on us the devolution of federal power to localities; every time free speech is trampled under the guise of "community standards"; every time urbanites declare "not in my backyard," or ruralites chase jack-booted thugs off their property with constitutionally protected sidearms, they are perversely calling Boas forth as well. They are articulating, in tones more caustic than the humanist Boas could ever have imagined, the strange twists his idea of the world as a honeycomb of self-sufficient, hermetic cultural modules could take among those less humanistically inclined than he. "We're fighting for our freedoms and our liberties, and our way of life," Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-ID), of black helicopter fame, has recently opined. "And our way of life out here is something that in the East they can't fathom."

To point this out is not to disparage Boas, any more than to revile *The Bell Curve* is to indict Darwin. The path that ideas take—and the course of American racial history—is even more baroque than Bederman allows. Can we entertain the notion, for the sake of richer argument, that today's new racism, based more on the rigid defense of the enclave than on visions of Aryan eschatology, could not have taken shape the way it did without Boas' conception of "culture"? Timothy McVeigh's vicious redemption of masculine anxiety, pace Bederman, is not really rooted in the desire to take over the world. He'd rather just be left alone. And the history of that feral turn in American culture has yet to be written.

Rick Perlstein is staff writer at *Linguafranca* in New York.

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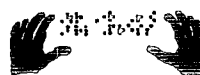
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*Continued from page 40*

Homewood the next afternoon. Three black people I asked for directions told me not to go to Homewood. "Why do you want to go to Homewood? Here, we'll give you money. Take a bus."

I said: "Have you ever heard of John Edgar 'Wide-man? He's one of my favorite writers and he writes about Homewood."

They said "Yeah, but you don't want to go there unless you have a gun."

"A gun?" I said. "I don't even have mace."

"Please! Let us give you money for a bus."

In fact, Homewood is a nice, peaceful working-class neighborhood. There is one high-rise project—it looks like a luxury condominium.

○ Anacostia is supposed to be the most fucked-up area in Washington, D.C. I walked around for two hours among modest homes with neat lawns. Finally, I came to a school yard with all these guys hanging out on the corner. Someone had written "WAR ZONE" on a nearby electric box. I went over and asked the guys for directions. No problem. The only place I encountered any hostility was right on the border of a white neighborhood near Howard University. I was putting up a poster that said "Bomb the Suburbs" on an abandoned building. A student shouted "We're gonna bomb your ass" from the window of his passing jeep and then kept driving.

○ Philly was the only city that really scared me. In one long, hot afternoon, I got dunked in fire hydrants three times.

○ New York City was surprisingly nice. I walked around the South Bronx for four hours, before and after sunset. All of the public housing projects I visited—the Mill Brooks Projects, Mitchell Homes, and about four others—were totally integrated, well taken care of, and bustling with life. No one offered to sell me drugs, and only one wino asked me for spare change. Harlem at night, Alphabet City in the morning, and a huge zig-zag through Brooklyn. East New York, five or six projects in Brownsville, then Crown Heights, East Flatbush, Bed-Stuy. I was like: "Where are all the bad neighborhoods?"

○ Boston barely even has a ghetto. I walked through all the projects in Mission Hill, Roxbury and Dorchester on the 4th of July from sunset 'til 1 a.m. The worst thing that happened was one guy throwing a firecracker at me out of a car.

I've got about 14 more cities left to go. I've hitchhiked a total of about five weeks now, been all over the country in hundreds of cars. Never once has a real sicko picked me up. A couple of guys put their hands on my legs, but that's about it.

Most of the drivers who pick me up are like a Who's Who of the most extraordinary people in America today. I had imagined before I hitchhiked that the people who picked me up would be truckers and carloads of burly

guys with tinted windows and menacing moustaches. Wrong. Truckers almost never pick you up because of the liability. Tinted windows never pick you up because they're too cool, criminals never pick you up because they're too paranoid, and groups rarely pick you up because they don't need anyone to talk to.

On average, it takes me 20 to 25 minutes to get a ride. A huge proportion of the drivers are independently employed or own their own businesses. About a fifth of them are extremely religious. About a fourth of them are gay. Of all the people who've picked me up so far, I'd say less than one-fifth identified themselves as leftists. Some of the people I got along best with were racists, red-necks, conservatives and evangelical Christians.

The people I've met on my trip have shown me that the basic terms of my Bet With America are sound—that there's no reason to fear most Americans. What, then, do we all fear? Perhaps a big part of the urban terror that suburbanites are fleeing is the terrifying immediacy of communication in the inner city. I count on my friends from the ghetto to constantly remind me how spoiled I am, how sheltered I am, how selfish my instincts, how dull my character, how weak, how cowardly. And these are the routine lessons that I've learned every day in my Bet With America.

William Upski Wimsatt is the author of *Bomb the Suburbs* (Subway and Elevated Press). If Wimsatt wins his bet, a follow-up to this story will appear in an upcoming issue of *In These Times*—though we can't say exactly when. We do know that during August, he will be hitchhiking to independent bookstores and Tower stores along the West Coast, and in Albuquerque, Denver, Kansas City and St. Louis.

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# Bet With America

By William Upski Wimsatt

*I want to make a Bet With America. I'm betting my life. I believe America is becoming a nation based on fear—not only of crime and so-called bad neighborhoods, but of strangers in general. And that fear is destroying everything that's good about us: our democracy, our diversity, our freedom.*

The good news (and bad news) is this: America isn't even all that scary yet. To convince you of this, I'm hitchhiking across America and going to all of the so-called bad neighborhoods. If I get killed, I lose the bet. If I win, you have to consider what I'm saying. I believe that running away from the people we fear most—what I call the suburban mentality—is the source of America's deepest problems, from the mediocrity of our schools to the decline of our press.

So far in my trip, I've been to Cleveland, Pittsburgh, D.C., Baltimore, Philly, New York and Boston. I accept rides from anyone who stops and never ask to get out of the car unless I have to go to the bathroom. Every city I get to I head straight for the public housing projects, walk through the courts, cut

across abandoned lots, or head down whatever streets or alleys seem the scariest to me. The conventional wisdom about crime says I should have been killed dozens of times by now. But nothing has happened. The only crime that's happened to me, so far is a white girl from Monroeville, a suburb of Pittsburgh, stole my diary and some jeans out of my bag as souvenirs.

Most people, when they find out I'm doing this, don't know how to process the information. What's the catch, they want to know. Are you packing a gun? Do you run into the neighborhoods and then run back out? Do you walk around at 7 a.m. with a hood over your head so nobody sees you? No, no, and no. What's the catch? The catch is that if you're a white male in America, but don't act like an asshole, have some wits about yourself, and treat others as you'd have them treat you, it is not particularly dangerous to walk around any neighborhood at any hour of the day or night.

But so what if some white guy can walk around in the ghetto? What good does that do? What's the point? I'm not trying to say that slum neighborhoods are safe. Especially if you live there and are related to the drug trade, or if you're acting phony, nervous or condescending, there's a good chance you'll get your ass whupped. Still, my survival proves first hand that all the suburban authority figures don't necessarily know what they're talking about.

● On my first day out of Chicago, I got to East Cleveland at sunset, and went to the East and Southeast sides of Cleveland after dark.

● I walked up North Avenue in Baltimore at midnight on a Saturday and down Pennsylvania Avenue at 2 a.m.

● In Pittsburgh, I went to these projects in the North Hills around midnight, got to Federal Street at 1 a.m., hit the Hill District at 2 a.m., and walked through

END

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